

AT  
THE NEW THEATRE  
AND OTHERS

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WALTER PRICHARD EATON



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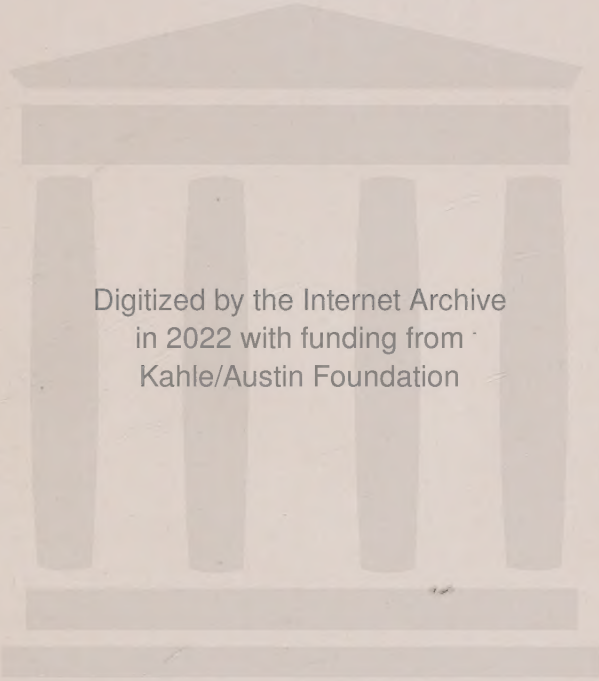
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# AT THE NEW THEATRE AND OTHERS

*THE AMERICAN STAGE: ITS PROBLEMS  
AND PERFORMANCES  
1908-1910*

BY

WALTER PRICHARD EATON

AUTHOR OF "THE AMERICAN STAGE OF TO-DAY," ETC.



BOSTON  
SMALL, MAYNARD AND COMPANY  
PUBLISHERS

AT  
THE NEW THEATRE  
AND OTHERS

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Entered at Stationers' Hall

THE UNIVERSITY PRESS, CAMBRIDGE, U. S. A.

To  
GEORGE PIERCE BAKER

PROFESSOR OF DRAMATIC LITERATURE IN  
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

FOUNDER IN THAT INSTITUTION OF A PIONEER COURSE  
FOR THE STUDY OF DRAMATIC COMPOSITION

KEEN AND CATHOLIC CRITIC

INSPIRING LEADER IN THE MOVEMENT FOR A BETTER  
APPRECIATION AMONG EDUCATED MEN OF THE  
ART OF THE PRACTICAL THEATRE





WITH one or two exceptions, the papers in this volume are reprinted from various daily or monthly journals, though with frequent additions and alterations. The author wishes to thank the editors of "The Atlantic Monthly," "Scribner's Magazine," "The American Magazine," "Munsey's Magazine," and "The Craftsman" for the permission they have accorded him. His thanks are especially due to Mr. H. T. Parker, Dramatic Critic of "The Boston Transcript," and Mr. James O'Donnell Bennett, Dramatic Critic of "The Chicago Record-Herald," whose columns have been at all times generously open to the expression of his opinions, and without whose co-operation this book would have been impossible.



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AT THE NEW THEATRE  
AND OTHERS



# INTRODUCTION

## THE THEATRICAL SYNDICATE

SINCE the autumn of 1908, when a number of dramatic reviews by the present writer, covering the previous season, were collected in a volume, much of importance has happened in the American theatre. The volume here put forward aims to collect in more permanent form the record of some of these occurrences, set down at the time in newspapers or a little more leisurely in magazines. Such records, obviously, claim no literary value; they do not aspire to the dignity of covers and a title-page on that ground; and the author trusts that they will not be condemned on that ground. But what plays were produced in our theatre during a given period, what impressions they made on a sympathetic spectator, and what tendencies were at work shaping our drama, are of historic value to those interested in the practical playhouse; and a record of them is worthy, to that extent, of preservation. Much that is theoretical is issued in book form about the theatre,

but little which contains a reportorial impression of the times gets beyond the daily or at most the monthly publications. The present writer, therefore, puts forward his book unblushingly and makes no promises of good behavior in the future.

During the seasons of 1908-09 and 1909-10 the most interesting developments in the American dramatic world have been the steady rise to strength of an opposition to the so-called Theatrical Syndicate and the opening of the New Theatre in New York. The New Theatre is still, after one season, an experiment. It is not truly an endowed institution, but a private playhouse depending for its support on the continued good will of its wealthy founders. It was not democratic in its inception nor planned by men shrewdly versed in the difficult craft of the theatre. It has labored under a great handicap. Its future usefulness, if not its very existence, will depend upon how well those at its head learn the lesson of experience. But its field of possible achievement is mighty; it represents a significant effort to place the drama in this country upon a level with the other arts, above the truck of commerce. The rise of an opposition to the Theatrical Syndicate has been, in a different way, no less significant and, so far, very much more successful.



The Theatrical Syndicate, as it is popularly called, an organization of six men first banded together in 1895-96 to control all the first-class theatres in America, for almost fifteen years so nearly accomplished this iniquitous purpose that practically every play producer and theatre owner in the country paid to these piratical gentlemen, directly or indirectly, an exorbitant toll for his "bookings," the theatre managers everywhere being further reduced to the status of janitors. They no longer had any say about the attractions at their houses. They took, willy-nilly, whatever the Syndicate booking agency sent to them. Naturally, it became impossible for a local theatre manager to maintain a personal standard for his house. The past decade has seen the utter decay in this country of the theatre with a standard, where subscribers could come from week to week sure of a play worth while. As the past decade has also seen — thanks in no small measure to the methods of the Syndicate — a decay of intelligent newspaper criticism, the rule of the Syndicate has made for artistic chaos.

But a greater evil of the Syndicate has lain in the character of the men who compose it, or are its close allies. However sharp their business brains may be, the majority of them are utterly devoid of artistic sensibility, re-

finement of taste, even of any practical skill in stage craft. They are utterly unfitted to control the destinies of a Fine Art, utterly unfitted to shoulder the responsibilities of influencing the thoughts, the tastes, the emotions of a vast portion of the public — for the man who assumes to present a play ceases at once to be merely a business individual and becomes a public servant. For such service these men are ludicrously incompetent. The most intelligent and the most respectable of their number, and the only one who has any standing in the community at large, has, by clever manipulation of the physical resources of the theatre, more or less “cornered” the English play market. He has thriven largely by presenting in America replicas of productions made for him in London by such authors as Barrie, Jones, Pinero and Captain Marshall. Personally, however, he has maintained in those productions and theatres bearing his name a seemly standard ; he has done little or nothing for the native playwright, but he has brought to us many excellent foreign works, and, in so far, he has performed a useful service. But his good name must always suffer from the company he has kept, the practices his strength as an ally has made possible. His colleagues, and more especially the two men directly in charge of the Syndi-

cate booking office, have, as was natural and inevitable, in their iron-clad control of the theatres of America given the first favors and the choicest routes to such plays as promised the largest pecuniary returns to them, irrespective of merit; and in their own productions they have reflected their low personal tastes and artistic capacities. A theatre such as the Hollis Street in Boston, once a local pride, has been debauched by the infliction from the central booking office in New York of cheap and vulgar "shows," until now its high dramatic standard is a thing of memory; and it is but one of many.

Inasmuch as no actor or producer could hope to secure a profitable tour for his play unless the play seemed "a good business proposition" to the men in control of the theatres (which meant too often unless the actor or producer would surrender his artistic ideals or his business independence), the blight of their sordid standards and dull comprehension was over our entire stage. There was no thought, no understanding, in their minds of the theatre as an art or a beneficent influence. For them the theatre existed solely as a means of pecuniary profit. The true artist's willingness to make sacrifices for his ideal was beyond their remotest ken. They have in the immediate past offered some of the vilest and most sal-

acious farces and musical comedies in some of their best theatres, while persistently discouraging the efforts of men who were trying to do finer but less immediately profitable things. Furthermore, by making independence and competition impossible, the Theatrical Syndicate has in the past decade, beyond any shadow of doubt, retarded the advancement of dramatic art in America by reducing the output of real artists, like Mrs. Fiske, who refused to yield to their tyrannical demands, by stifling the efforts of new native playwrights whose work, for appreciation, demanded more intelligent consideration than any members of the Syndicate could give it, and by actually keeping out of the theatre altogether men whose decency revolted at such conditions.

All this, however, has now been radically changed. The thanks of the public are due to the rival firm of managers who have fought for "the open door," and conquered; who have said that every theatre should enjoy the right to book what plays it chooses, irrespective of faction, and made their words good. It is not necessary to raise the question whether these rival managers are themselves much better equipped than their opponents with artistic sensibilities and training for the delicate task of selecting and mounting plays. They have fought for a principle, — the principle of the

open door; and the man with a principle always commands respect. For years the Syndicate, by its control of the vast majority of theatres through the country, had successfully said to the actor or manager, "You play in our theatres and at our terms, or you don't play at all." To refuse meant to starve. To obey meant not only the payment of a heavy and unjust toll, but also too frequently the surrender of artistic ideals. One firm of managers, however, refused, and they fought the Syndicate by the erection of rival theatres. During the past two years they have acquired more and more theatres, and more and more managers have been coming over to their camp. In May, 1910, twelve hundred of the "one night stand" theatres through the country joined forces with them, declaring that they no longer would agree to house Syndicate attractions only, but would welcome any play from any manager, without a booking fee. This was the final blow to the Syndicate's monopoly. Because there are at present so many theatres to supply with attractions, the American playwright, who has for two seasons been coming rapidly into his own, has now a wider opportunity for a hearing than ever before. The small producer, sure that if one camp will not welcome his play the other will, is now practically free to mount what he pleases in the

way that pleases him. Actors may now follow the lead of Mr. Faversham, taking their destinies into their own hands, where they properly belong. Under the spur of free competition and independence we are likely to see in the immediate future a revolt of the better players from the tyranny of the single rôle, and the healthful growth of repertoires. We are likely to see, also, with the breaking up of the Syndicate's monopoly of our theatre and the consequent opportunity of the manager to arrange his tour to suit himself, a return to a standard in the better playhouses through the country. Just as Mrs. Fiske, who stood out for her independence at great sacrifice through the entire period of the Syndicate's dominance, is now permitted by that institution to play in their theatres if she chooses, or in rival houses if she chooses — exactly the principle she was fighting for — so the time will probably come again now when the local theatre managers through the country will have some say about their season's bookings; and those who possess pride and a decent sense of responsibility will not be forced to offer their patrons *Anna Held* or "*The Girl from Rector's*" when they desire to maintain a playhouse of reputable standing.

With the control of the playhouses of the country taken by healthful competition out of



the hands of a small group of vulgarians and traders in New York and placed where it belongs, in the hands of theatrical artists, whether actors and actresses or men who combine business management with an artistic conscience and judgment — men and women like Henry Miller, William Faversham, Mr. Sothorn and Miss Marlowe, Mrs. Fiske, Miss Maxine Elliott (who owns a theatre in New York), George C. Tyler, Henry W. Savage, Walter Hampden and Daniel V. Arthur, — to name only a few — the chances for vital and stimulating experiment and achievement on our stage are brighter than they have been for more than a decade. The men who will have the final say concerning what is produced on our stage will not be a small group of money-grubbing vulgarians in New York, but the real artists of the theatre.

Physically, the theatre has always been too often in the hands of incompetent men; and latterly in America it has been predominantly so. This is wrong. It should be controlled physically by men capable of guiding its artistic destinies as well and of realizing its spiritual significance and power. The farther its destinies are controlled not by shop keepers and money changers but by the actors and artists themselves, the better and more ideally it will serve the community. Not the mere increase



in the number of theatres in America during the past few seasons, great as that has been, not the startling tendency (save in the case of the New Theatre!) to build tiny playhouses of drawing-room size and intimacy, like Maxine Elliott's Theatre in New York, not even the hopeful number of new native dramas treating thoughtfully our contemporary life, all of which have been frequently emphasized as significant signs of the times, are the most significant signs of the times. What is most significant is the dawning opportunity for independent and unhampered effort by the true artists of the theatre, the serious actors and the trained and competent managers. These are the men and women who are willing to sacrifice to the ideal; and the measure of their sacrifice is the measure of our advance.

# Part I



## A YEAR AT THE NEW THEATRE — SUMMARY

THE New Theatre has seemed to many observers not unlike the New Thought — somewhat vague and not particularly new. Just what artistic advance the theatre intends to further by its choice of plays is not much clearer at the conclusion of the first season than it was at the beginning; just what the theatre stands for in the dramatic world is not yet definitely outlined. And, in its physical proportions, the New Theatre is a reversion to the auditorium of a half-century and more ago — it is at least fifty years behind the times; while in its scheme of highly privileged support, its utterly undemocratic horseshoe of founders' boxes around which the auditorium has in reality been built, it is a direct product, almost a copy, of conditions pertaining to that fashionable and exotic pastime of the very well-to-do, — grand opera. In these important respects, there is nothing new about it.

In the New York *Evening World* of March 28, 1908, was published an interview with the late Heinrich Conried, then director of the

Metropolitan Opera House. In the course of this interview he said, "I have been chosen to plan the New Theatre in every detail. The architects made their plans in accordance with my suggestions, and I now have in preparation the plans for the stage, the mechanical arrangements necessary for the proper production of plays." And he further stated that the New Theatre, though it was not supported by the government, would be a truly "national" theatre, an "educational" institution. Unfortunately, his first statement was correct — unfortunately, because Mr. Conried's entire dramatic experience in America had been confined to his German playhouse, and later to the Metropolitan Opera House. His own training as an actor had been gained in the old-fashioned Teutonic plays of long ago. He was ignorant of many obvious conditions on the modern stage, especially the English-speaking stage, and, furthermore, he was ambitious to continue his operatic management, so profitable to him in many ways. Mr. Conried died, and when the group of some thirty wealthy men whom he had gathered together as founders of the New Theatre, each subscribing at the start \$35,000, summoned Granville Barker from England to consider the post of director, Mr. Barker found an auditorium, already nearing completion, which was so vast and so badly

constructed for the performance of modern drama that he took one look and went back to London.

The auditorium was designed by the architects on its present scale not only to meet the needs of opera (since opera cannot be profitably presented without large audiences), but also to make prominent display of a horseshoe of twenty-three founders' boxes. The founders of the New Theatre are chiefly men financially interested in the Metropolitan Opera House and pillars of its social prestige. Their idea, and presumably the idea of their wives, — whose influence cannot be left out of the reckoning, — was to duplicate at the New Theatre operatic conditions, "to dramatize the diamond horseshoe," as Henry Miller puts it. Now, quite aside from the utterly undemocratic nature of such a social display in a playhouse loftily announced as "national" in scope and "educational" in intention, this horseshoe of boxes, ranged at the rear of the orchestra-chairs, threw the whole scheme of the auditorium out of scale for a theatre. In order to make the occupants of the boxes prominently visible, the balconies could not be swung forward over the orchestra floor. The first row of the balconies is no nearer the stage than this row of boxes, and the last row of the third, and highest, balcony

is thus distant from the stage almost double the depth of the large orchestra pit, besides being raised an enormous distance in air. Over this orchestra pit yawns a mighty void, wherein the voices of the actors wander tentative and dim. From the balcony not only is it a strain to hear, but the stage is so far off that it seems to be viewed through the wrong end of an opera-glass. Any intimacy with the play and players is utterly out of the question. Thus, as a result of the double blunder in the original scheme of the New Theatre, the plan to mix drama and opera in the same house and the plan to make of it a social diversion for the wealthy founders, the theatre has started on its career under a well-nigh insurmountable handicap.

It would seem that the founders and their families, if we may judge by the infrequency of their use of the boxes, recognize this fact. The truth is that the dramatic performances at the New Theatre do not interest them; and a potent cause is the lack of intimacy in the auditorium, for which they themselves are to blame. It should require no argument to convince anyone at all familiar with the stage that the modern intimate auditorium is an integral part of the modern intimate drama and acting; that we can no more go back with pleasure and profit to the old vasty spaces where

Forrest thundered than we can go back to the old plays which gave him ammunition. And it should require no argument to convince any thoughtful observer that men, however wealthy, prominent, and philanthropic, when they announce that they are going to build a playhouse for the public good and the uplift of the drama, and then, for the exotic pastime of grand opera and the prominent display of their own persons, erect an auditorium utterly destructive of dramatic illusion, especially in those regions where the poorer classes must sit, need not be surprised if the public does not hail them unreservedly as benefactors nor flock to their theatre. There is a distinct taint of insincerity and snobbishness in the New Theatre which has perverted its physical design and threatens its usefulness. To deny this, or to try to disguise it, would be, to put it mildly, a waste of time.

The crying need of the New Theatre before another season begins, then, is a radical alteration of the auditorium, which of course means, first, the abolition of the incongruous grand opera. Fortunately, the abolition of opera is certain, and some consequent changes will be made in the auditorium, looking toward a reduction of its size. The founders of the theatre, who are its absolute owners and who will bear the heavy deficit, have a right to their



boxes, and neither critic nor public has any voice in the matter. But possibly a lessening of the deficit might atone to some extent for the loss of the boxes; and possibly, too, the greater usefulness of the theatre to the public, the greater vividness and interest of its productions, might act as compensation, if the founders are sincere in their expressed desire to serve the stage in America. By alternate occupancy a lesser number of boxes ranged (no less prominently!) to right and left of the proscenium, as in an ordinary theatre, might conceivably suffice. Then the balconies could be swung forward, the top balcony — at present a pocket to catch and deaden sound — eliminated, and the too-high ceiling lowered. If some of the overload of ostentatious decoration were lost in the process, so much the better. Thus arranged for greater intimacy, the house would hold enough people — say sixteen hundred — for probably profitable operation, with eight performances a week, if it was kept reasonably full. As originally constructed it seats twenty-three hundred people, at least half of them farther from the stage than the rear of the orchestra pit. Certainly the gain in intimacy, vividness, and enjoyment of the play would be incalculable. Until something of the sort is done the New Theatre will remain an opulent semi-failure, be the company

never so fine and the plays presented never so worthy.

But the New Theatre in its opening season has at least demonstrated anew the value and possibilities of the stock company, playing in repertoire. There have been errors in casting, and an unfortunate disposition has been shown to engage stars instead of standing bravely out for the resident-stock-company idea. The engagement of Mr. Sothern and Miss Marlowe was ill advised, for example, as was that of Miss Annie Russell. A stock company's first duty is to develop its own members to play adequately all leading rôles. In the classic revivals, no less here than on the commercial stage, the lack of adequate training in our present-day players has been apparent — which is further proof of the need for just such a company. But, especially among the men of the company, many players have given striking proof of the value to the actor of frequently varied impersonations, and the public has watched their growth with steadily increasing interest. Even two such recognized artists as Ferdinand Gottschalk and Albert Bruning have for the first time been able to show to the public the full ripeness and resources of their art. And, in modern plays (like "Don" and "Strife") the New Theatre, in its first season, has increased the public

appreciation of ensemble acting, demonstrated vividly its superiority over a "one man" performance.

In his "Life and Art of Richard Mansfield," William Winter quotes a letter from that actor to him, dated 1905, which contains these words: "The actors themselves are all only too glad to get a good salary and study only one part a season, and this they can do, with Mr. Frohman and others. I stand quite alone, for both the Frohmans and other managers, and all the actors, are against me." If Mansfield suffered from what Shaw calls "the solitary despotism of his own temperament," if that was what killed him, it was also what made him great, fed the flame of his ambition and his genius. The endowed stock company can seldom breed, and probably almost never keep, a dramatic genius like Mansfield, — that is, a man who, as actor, flames triumphantly and, as producer, shapes the entire performance. If a stock company did not stifle such a genius he would disrupt the stock company. But in one winter the New Theatre has shown that it can recruit a company of intelligent artists, both young and old, who are cheerfully willing, nay, eager, to learn more than one part a season; and that, under this spur and with this opportunity, many of them develop and ripen in their art with encouraging

rapidity. In spite of the lack of training which has hampered it in presenting the classics, the New Theatre company is already a potential force in the dramatic life of America. It is training players to varied impersonation, and the public to an appreciation of impersonation rather than personality, to an understanding of acting as an art.

Let us turn now to the repertoire of the first season.

The New Theatre opened on November 6, 1909, under the direction of Mr. Winthrop Ames, with a dress rehearsal, amounting to a public performance, of Shakespeare's "Antony and Cleopatra." Although the prospectus of the house shrewdly pointed out the evils of the star system, the theatre opened with a star play, if ever there was one, and engaged for the two star parts Mr. Sothern and Miss Marlowe, "for a limited period." Here was a departure from the stock-company idea at the very start. Furthermore, not only are Mr. Sothern and Miss Marlowe too habituated to the star system to work genially in stock-company harness, but they are manifestly unfitted for the rôles of Antony and Cleopatra. Had a Shakespearian play been chosen for the opening bill wherein they could appear to advantage, — say "Twelfth Night," — at least the desolate dullness of that inaugural per-

formance would have been avoided. As a matter of fact, those in charge of the New Theatre did not have the courage of their convictions. They were themselves so habituated to the popular estimate of a name (and a novelty) that they called in two prominent stars and chose a play long disused to give their theatre this dubious advantage, in defiance of repertoire-company idea.

“Antony and Cleopatra” was a dismal failure. Even the minor parts were not well played, and the performance dragged sluggishly. Gloom rested on the New Theatre, and it was not visibly dispelled on November 11, when the second dramatic production was made, of a light fantastic comedy by Edward Knoblauch, called “The Cottage in the Air” — a play adapted from the story, “The Princess Priscilla’s Fortnight.” It was a trifling affair, not so well written as a comedy of similar theme then current on Broadway. It disclosed no originality of fancy, no depth of feeling, no cleverness of dramatic design. It was of a conventionally romantic type long familiar on our stage through much better examples. The only reasonable excuse the directors of the New Theatre can offer for staging it is that they had nothing else.

Six days later, however, on November 17, a play was disclosed of quite another stamp —

John Galsworthy's "Strife." This astonishingly gripping dramatic argument was staged with careful and seemingly artless realism, and acted by the long cast, headed by Albert Brunning and Louis Calvert, with clearness, force, and emotional sincerity. "Strife" tells the story of a factory strike; it presents by turns the laborers' side and the employers' side; it shows the fiery, passionate labor leader broken at the end, and the stern old leader of the capitalists broken, too. It does not spare details of the suffering of the mill-people, nor does it fail to show their unreasonableness and vacillation. It makes out a case for each side, and then solves the strike by arbitration on terms considered by both sides before the fight began. In this ironic conclusion it points a silent finger toward the coöperative commonwealth. "Strife" is a powerful and thoughtful play, written in a restrained but truly nervous style, and superbly acted by the New Theatre company. And it is safe to say that no American commercial manager would have produced it. When it came on, the friends of the New Theatre for the first time took heart.

On December 4, "The Nigger" was produced, the second play written by an American author but the first to treat of American subjects. The author is Edward Sheldon, who recently emerged from Harvard College with



"Salvation Nell" and sold it to Mrs. Fiske. This youthful dramatist has the courage of large themes. In "The Nigger" he plunged boldly across the Mason and Dixon line and endeavored to set forth the tragedy of a high-spirited and high-minded Southerner — the governor of a state — who finds suddenly that his blood is tainted by ancestral miscengenation, and renounces (perforce!) all he has held most dear to go down and labor among his black kind. Here, unquestionably, is a big, vital theme, however unpleasant to some palates. But Mr. Sheldon has as yet neither the maturity of mind and heart to present it adequately nor the technical facility to weave it into a convincing narrative. His play, at first raw with the bravado of extreme youth defying artistic restraint, is later discursive and dull. Nor was it acted with any distinction. But it was an honest attempt at significant native drama, and worth doing.

Next of the dramatic productions was a second classic, "The School for Scandal," made on December 16. In spite of the inadequacy of its representation, it has proved the most popular play in the repertoire, thanks to its immortal charm. A company that in "Strife" played exquisitely in one key — the key of realism — here played in almost as many keys as there are characters. Mr. Cor-

bin, the literary director during the first season, has written that Mr. Calvert, the producer and exponent of Sir Peter, "made it his artistic aim to play for the reality and essential humor of the comedy. . . . Sir Peter became a warm-hearted old fellow, sorely tried and often vexed, to be sure, but above all a gentleman, and deeply in love with his madcap wife." But "the essential humor of the comedy" was just what was lost. It was a comparatively mirthless performance, without sparkle, because half of the company tried evidently for a modern key of realism and missed their "points." Does Mr. Corbin fancy the deep-hearted Sir Peter of William Warren was less of a gentleman, or less in love with his wife, than this toned-down and colorless Sir Peter of Mr. Calvert? Hardly! If you are going to play Sheridan, play Sheridan. And to play Sheridan with a modern company, we should perhaps bear in mind, requires, after all, some heart-breaking experiment and training.

Then, on December 30, came a one-act play, called "Liz, the Mother" (over which we will hastily draw the veil of silence; it slumbers now in the storehouse, after the single performance), and Rudolph Besier's "Don." This last is a comedy, produced with success in England, setting forth with sufficient plausi-



bility for comedy purposes, and with much humorous irony, the adventures of a young idealistic philanthropist — a sort of modern Shelley, plus propriety — who tries to take an unhappy wife away from her husband and bring her to his parents' house. His father is a conventional Canon of the church, his mother a conventional Canon's wife, his fiancée's father a conventional army officer, and the pursuing husband a fanatic member of the Plymouth Brethren. Here, surely, are the materials for ironic comedy. The young philanthropist emerges wiser, if no less philanthropic; the Plymouth Brother takes his wife back, to treat her to less religion and more love; and the boy's mother does not understand anything that has happened. The piece was almost faultlessly acted, with a gay dash, clean-cut characterization, and abundant feeling. It was perilously near farce, yet with intellectual tang and real point. It was distinctly worth doing.

Next, on January 26, 1910, the third classic was produced, "Twelfth Night." It had an unimpressive performance. The roistering scenes, to be sure, were amusing, though Sir Toby and Sir Andrew rather rioted to rule. But Miss Annie Russell was utterly inadequate as Viola, and the Malvolio was no better. When Viola is neither romantic nor gay-spirited and Malvolio neither comic or tragic,

"Twelfth Night" is hardly brought to life. Miss Marlowe and Mr. Sothern had left the company, but Miss Matthison had joined it. The play was inexcusably miscast, and its charm was lost.

On February 14 "The Witch" was produced — a play adapted by Hermann Hagedorn from the Scandinavian of H. Wiers-Jensen. It proved gloomy, unreal, stilted, theatrical, and was so acted. Mr. Hagedorn shifted the scene from ancient Scandinavia to the Salem, Massachusetts, of 1692. There can be little excuse for this sort of thing at such a house as the New Theatre. A foreign drama should either be played as it was written or not at all. Adapt an alien plot, with its inherent motives and characters, to an American setting, and you ruin the original without producing anything genuinely and sincerely American. "The Witch" as it came to the stage of the New Theatre suggested that Sardou had visited Salem, Massachusetts, and fogged his melodramatic fervor in the gloom of traditional Puritanism. The Puritans of "The Witch" were unreal beings, spouting endless streams of tiresome, unreal talk in a dreary sing-song. Actually, the Puritans of witchcraft days were deep-hearted, religious zealots, and Cotton Mather, leader against the witches, has left writings of a beautiful sim-

plicity and eloquence. Nor does the motive of illicit love, treated not in the deep spiritual key of Hawthorne but in the key of Sardou, make for pleasure or profit in a Puritan drama. "The Witch" did not have even the excuse of sustained theatrical interest. It was dull as well as false.

On March 14 a double bill was presented, — act four of Ibsen's "Brand" (condensed), and Maeterlinck's "Sister Beatrice," a morality play originally written as a libretto. The plays were not well contrasted for one evening's fare, there being something too much of severity; and "Brand" was very badly played, into the bargain, though it is hard to sympathize with those who find this fourth act unintelligible without the others. "Sister Beatrice," the title part beautifully acted by Miss Matthison, was mounted in an exquisite setting, one of the most exquisite ever shown on a New York stage. The play, however, just failed of its true effect because the management, ignoring completely the author's directions to play the second act in sunlight, played the entire piece in a night gloom, thus at one stroke destroying the atmospheric contrast between the human frailty of Beatrice and the joyous, divine forgiveness of the Virgin, and tinging a naïve legend, essentially fresh, with artificial solemnity.

On March 28 "The Winter's Tale" was revived, on a stage simply dressed in the Elizabethan manner. The presence of Miss Mathison in the cast—an actress admirably adapted for a company presenting classic and poetic plays—and the interest of the archaic setting and the complete and coherent text, combined to make the production unusually worth while, and certainly as "educational" as Mr. Conried could have desired. Another production had been promised, of René Fauchois's "dramatic biography," "Beethoven." But this production, postponed through lack of time for rehearsal, was ultimately made by other actors, after the season of the New Theatre company had closed. It need not, therefore, concern us here, any more than the production of "A Son of the People," on February 28, by John Mason and his company.

Counting the fourth act of "Brand" as a separate production, and forgetting "Liz, the Mother," in kindness to all concerned, we find that the New Theatre, in its first season of twenty-four weeks, made eleven dramatic productions with its own company, four of them classics; that is, according to the definition of the literary director, plays which "after one hundred years are still alive and welcome to the public." "Antony and Cleopatra" was n't

very warmly welcomed, but possibly Shakespeare could not wholly be blamed! Thus one-third of the repertoire was classic, a just and admirable proportion, to be maintained in future seasons. Of the remaining seven plays only two were original works by American authors, and only one of them was a treatment of American characters and conditions. This is neither a just nor an admirable proportion. Of the five modern plays that completed the first season's repertoire, three — "Strife," "Sister Beatrice," and act four of "Brand" — represent widely different types of style and thought, but each is the work of a man of power; each is large, significant, and was wisely added to the New Theatre's list. "Don," also, striking a lighter note, almost a farcical note, without being commonplace or cheap, added welcome spice and gayety. "The Witch," as it came to the stage, was neither foreign drama nor American, and did not justify its production.

The repertoire for the first season, then, especially in the light of the fact that the intrusion of grand opera prevented more than eleven productions, contained a hopeful number of significant and worthy plays, and trained the company in a wide variety of parts, including those of classic poetic drama, artificial comedy, modern realism, modern farce-comedy,

and allegory. Where it was deficient, woefully deficient, was in American drama. The excuse is offered that, from two thousand manuscripts submitted, nothing better could be picked. And this excuse is probably valid, hard as the uninitiated will find it to believe. The New Theatre has not yet the prestige to attract the work of such native writers for the stage as possess real and tested talent. It cannot offer to them, even at the high rate of one hundred and fifty dollars a performance, sufficient royalties to draw their work away from the commercial theatre. And right here lies the most important field of future effort for the New Theatre.

If it is to be only a house where a resident stock company presents the classics and such European novelties as are not likely to reach our stage through the ordinary channels, its usefulness is limited and its purpose rather vague. Its appeal will remain to a narrow circle of patrons, and for the democratic mass of theatre-goers it will bear an academic taint. But if it can add to this appeal the appeal of vital American drama written without any thought of happy or unhappy endings, any consideration of the demands of a star performer, any need to conciliate the prejudices of ignorant or vulgar managers or to pander to supposed popular taste, then the New The-



atre will come to stand for something definite, progressive and fine in American dramatic art, something national and truly new. We have had "art theatres" before. As a flower of the field, so they flourished. We have had, also, stock companies in the past. William Warren was a wonderful example of the artist a stock company can produce. There were kings before Agamemnon. But we have never before had a theatre backed by such unlimited capital, equipped with such resources, founded upon a basis strong enough to endure the strain of financial loss, public neglect, and critical attack, until it can make for itself a new public and draw to itself the most daring and stimulating work of native playwrights.

In America to-day it is difficult to secure production for a native play with no star part. It is doubly difficult to secure production for a poetic play, or one with sectional appeal, or one that might conceivably offend this, that, or the other class. It is difficult to secure production for a "literary drama" (which is not, to be sure, an unmixed evil!) or an intellectual farce or a satire. It is almost impossible to secure production for a tragedy. Native plays of all these descriptions the New Theatre should—and doubtless even now would—welcome. Probably it can never promise to

the writer such financial returns as he would gain from a successful play in the commercial theatre. But, on the other hand, the native dramas the New Theatre should seek are those that are not certain of success in the commercial theatre, because they are written utterly for the delight of the author in free and frank self-expression, with no thought of star or manager or public in mind. Have we no playwrights who create sometimes from inner impulse, for love of their craft, and not solely from motives of sordid gain? Until we have such playwrights we shall never have a truly vital and worthy American drama; we shall, indeed, have no playwrights deserving the high title of artists.

The New Theatre, then, if it can find and produce from season to season, not one play like "The Nigger," but half a dozen, — and better plays than Mr. Sheldon's, — mounting them in the best possible manner, with well-balanced and forceful acting, will come, in our largest American city, to stand for something definite and American. It will train a public to be interested in new plays for their own sake, in the art of the drama, not merely to follow the mob to the latest success; it will attract fresh and solid and daring American work, and gain a prestige which will stamp the play of a new author with the sterling



mark. It is going to take time to bring this about; that we must expect, and be patient. But, in spite of the pitiful showing of native drama in the first season's repertoire, the dream is not Utopian. It can be brought to reality.

What, in working for the realization of this dream, the New Theatre must guard against with unceasing vigilance, however, is the insidious danger of immediate popularity. It will not do for the New Theatre to mount American plays no different from and no better than a dozen visible on Broadway, and then bask in the comfortable luxury of possibly full stalls. This is robbing the future to pay the present. The New Theatre must, perhaps for several years, reverse the process. It must rob the present to pay the future. It must gain for itself, at any sacrifice, a reputation not alone for an excellent company, for fine acting in the least as well as in the largest parts, but for a repertoire of native dramas with a distinction of style, a daring or originality of thought, a freshness of observation or ripeness of humor or pungency of satire, that cannot be found except in scattered instances in the commercial theatre. Thus, and thus alone, will it build up for itself a solid reputation and an enduring public, so that it can attract an ever-renewed supply of the best work of our best dramatists, and come to occupy in time the position of

leader in American theatrical affairs. Thus alone, at any rate, can it become truly a New Theatre.

## “STRIFE,” A DRAMATIC DEBATE

NEW THEATRE, November 17, 1909

“Strife,” by John Galsworthy, is constructed with the logical precision of a debate, and argues for both sides. But Mr. Galsworthy combines the temperament of the scientific investigator with the dramatist’s sense of character and the literary artist’s sense of natural incident and human speech. His play is peopled not with debaters but with persons; the debate is conducted in terms of life. Reaching the stage of the New Theatre, it found a director in Mr. George Foster Platt peculiarly fitted to order its action at once naturally and with logical progression, and a company of men and women — but especially men — to assume its many characters, who were at home in its modern realistic and polemic atmosphere and keen to reproduce with minute fidelity its stark picture of industrial conditions. “Strife” is a play which has few of the traditional elements of popular appeal, but yet one which satisfies as few dramas have done in recent years alike the

intellectual faculties of the beholder and his sense of reality. It is played at the New Theatre with beautiful devotion to the author's intent and, by each smallest actor, with self-effacing realism. Never was an audience more completely ignored from the stage. It is the kind of drama — or surely one kind of drama — which the New Theatre must rightly and inevitably shelter from the neglect of the commercial playhouse, and the manner in which this shelter has been afforded is the most hopeful sign of progress the New Theatre has yet displayed.

There is something refreshingly neuter about "Strife." It is an oasis of sanity in a desert of sex. The difference between a problem play and a popular play is usually a difference in the morals of the heroine — or her methods. But, since the Lord took a rib from Adam in the cause of woman's suffrage, men and women have occasionally been preoccupied with other things than each other; and if one of these alien matters is bravely chosen by a playwright for the theme of his play, there is no good reason why it should not remain the theme of his play. A great many authors have started hopefully out on this supposition, but almost invariably they have ended by introducing a "love interest" in deference to popular demand, and then it was all up with them.

Mr. Galsworthy, however, has a profound passion for truth. Starting out to consider the problem of a labor war, he insists on sticking to his task; he cannot be bothered with these irrelevant sentimental conventions of the playhouse. He cannot even permit himself to take sides with his characters. "Strife" pictures from both points of view a strike in a great tin-plate mill, and it pictures nothing else. It is dispassionate and neuter. It is an industrial debate wherein the arguments are the acts and the consequences of the acts of living people. It is a fresh note in drama, sounded by a comparatively new and splendidly equipped writer. His play, "The Silver Box," shown for too brief a time in America by Miss Ethel Barrymore, hinted it; "Strife" is the fulfillment.

The opening act of "Strife" shows the directors of the tin-plate mill in executive meeting, dominated by their chairman, John Anthony, an aged capitalist who has fought his employees before to a finish and who does not propose to give in now to their demands. He is a proud and willful man, but he commands respect. He represents the older order; he feels that he is fighting the battle of all capital for the right to do as it pleases, the extreme individualistic view of a generation ago. David Roberts, the fanatic leader of the strike, no less sincerely believes that he is fighting

the battle of all labor to prevent capital from doing as it pleases. Compromise between these two men is impossible. In spite of the efforts at arbitration made by a delegate from the Central Union and in spite of the wishes of the younger and more enlightened or humanitarian directors, including Anthony's own son, the strike goes on.

Act two shows first the interior of Roberts' home, where his beloved wife is dying for want of sufficient heat and food. But still Roberts will not yield. He is capable of offering a living sacrifice to his God, the cause of labor. Starkly, pitilessly, the results on their women of the laborers' battle is depicted. Then the scene shifts to the mill yard, under the black chimney stacks, and the mob of idle workmen are shown swayed now by this speaker, now by that. Roberts harangues them with the fiery zeal of a fanatic who will not compromise with his ideal. He is a blast-furnace Brand; he must have all or nothing. But he sees the men slipping from him and he is brought suddenly to silence by the news of his wife's death. The meeting — and the act — ends in a babel of quarreling tongues and a maze of striking fists. The laborers are presented in no more heroic a light than the capitalists.

In the last act the directors are meeting

again. They finally vote down old Anthony and agree to arbitrate. The workmen, having voted down Roberts, agree also. His pride broken, his cause seeming to him quite lost, Anthony resigns from the head of the company. There is something pathetic about him. The new order has passed him by. And Roberts, his cause lost, his pride and his heart alike broken, for the woman he sacrificed lies dead at home, is more than pathetic; he is tragic. The play closes with irony :

HARNESS, the delegate from the Central Union, speaks: A woman dead, and the two best men both broken!

TENCH (*staring at him, suddenly excited*) : D' you know, sir, — those terms, they 're the *very same* we drew up together, you and I, and put to both sides before the fight began? All this — all this — and — and what for?

HARNESS (*in a slow, grim voice*) : That 's where the fun comes in!

There is about this play, which some will complain ends nowhere, a grim completeness. It has presented one situation only, but it has presented that from every side and left it to the spectator to draw his own conclusions. Nothing more remains to be said; there only remains the awakened consciousness in us of

mutual obligations, and the world's need of mutual sympathy and brotherly recognition. The actors of the New Theatre company so self-effacingly labored for the good of the play that it is seemly none should here be signaled out for special mention. They splendidly did their part in presenting a play of genuine importance.

## MR. SHELDON WRESTLES AND IS THROWN

NEW THEATRE, December 4, 1909

The New Theatre made its fourth dramatic production on Saturday evening, December 4, 1909, and "The Nigger," by Edward Sheldon, author of "Salvation Nell," was the play chosen. This was the first truly native drama shown at the New Theatre, since the repertoire thus far had consisted of "Antony and Cleopatra"; "The Cottage in the Air," a fantastic comedy with scenes laid in Germany and England; and "Strife," which, though altered in scene to Ohio in the present performance, was written by Mr. Galsworthy, an Englishman. It really rested with Mr. Sheldon, then, a man young in years and experience, to supply the first American drama for the stage of the New



Theatre. The "Harvard playwright," as Mr. Sheldon has been somewhat laughingly dubbed, at least had the satisfaction of arousing in a New Theatre audience almost the first good, hearty, unashamed enthusiasm which had been heard in that aspiring and ornate institution. At the close of the second act the audience quite forgot the solemnity of the temple and called loudly for the blushing author, who finally came forth with the timidity of a startled robin, clung frantically to the proscenium frame for an instant, and bobbed out of sight again. He looked very young to have been speaking so plainly as he did sometimes in his play.

"The Nigger" has a purpose. Its chief trouble is that it has a better purpose than plan. Its purpose is to present on the stage in vivid, concrete terms the plight of the modern negro in the South, not to inveigh against white prejudice, not to counsel black rebellion, but to present sympathetically both sides, and to urge mutual toleration, patience, work for the good of all, the future good of the nation. More than incidentally the purpose of the play may be considered also to show the evils of the liquor traffic among the negroes.

Manifestly, here is a play that is aimed to touch life vitally in its choice of theme and material. Though the expedient of bringing



about a catastrophe by the discovery of negro blood in the veins of a leading character is not new — in Bernstein's "Israel," also visible in New York, the same expedient was used, with the variation of Hebrew blood, — the value of the play is not necessarily impaired by its artificial structure. If the purpose is to make a significant commentary on American life, the play naturally takes its place in the ranks of progress, not as one of the old machines for the manufacture of theatrical excitement.

The weakness of "The Nigger" lies rather in the fact that Mr. Sheldon had more to say than he quite knew how to say; that he was embarrassed by his wealth of material and the tremendous gravity of his theme, and between his efforts to make his mere story plain and theatrically effective and his efforts to make his moral — in the larger sense of that word — clear, his play progresses by alternate waves of action and debate, and in the final act (the third) repeats itself rather than moves forward. The total effect is neither one of a convincing argument nor a wholly convincing and moving story. The total effect is splotchy; and this only goes to show, perhaps, as Mr. Galsworthy has recently remarked, that the modern naturalistic drama of contemporaneous life is the most difficult of all drama to write.

The opening scene of "The Nigger" shows the great, pillared country mansion of Philip Morrow, who is one of those real "Southern gentlemen," as is proved by his hatred of "niggers." But he is also sheriff of the county, and has a conscience. When a young negro commits the "usual crime" (crazed by whiskey), Morrow attempts to shield him from the lynchers. Clifton Noyes, president of the big distillery, who has offered him the governorship because he is sure Morrow will veto a threatened prohibition bill, contrives, however, to prevent his candidate doing anything so fatal to his chances for election. The inevitable sweet Southern girl, whom Morrow loves, remarks consolingly and characteristically at the curtain, "After all, it was only a nigger." The chief merit of this act is its vivid suggestion of the horrors of the incident and the pursuit of the criminal by the lynching party. Not a pleasant topic, but one we can hardly blink at none the less.

By the second act Morrow has become governor. A race riot, in no small part incited by drink, has been in progress for some days, and Morrow has called out the State militia. He has come to the point where he sees it his duty to sign the prohibition bill, and he tells Noyes so. That gentleman then plays his card. Proof has come to him, in the shape of

a letter from a slave girl to Morrow's grandfather, that Morrow has "nigger blood" in his veins. His grandfather, a slave owner before the war, when his wife died in childbirth and the child died also, had substituted his child by the slave girl, sold the mother "down the river," and thus kept his property from passing to another branch of the family — Noyes's branch — which he disliked. (Judging from Noyes, you did not wholly blame him.) No one living knew of this deception save Morrow's "old mammy," a sister of the slave who was his real grandmother. Noyes demands that Morrow question her. He does so. She will admit nothing; she can remember nothing, she says, after the manner of aged negresses. Then Noyes demands that Morrow read aloud the letter from the slave girl, the letter which had disclosed to him the secret. This, perhaps, is the most poignant and effective moment of the play. As the old negress hears him read these touching, heart-breaking words from her dead, wronged, but doggedly devoted sister, she can stand it no longer. With a shriek she breaks down, crying out that it is her sister's voice she hears, lamenting to "de good Lord" that "things never seem to end," with a wail as piteous and thrilling as those wild, religious petitions of the black race.

Noyes then breaks in on Morrow's fresh

horror with the proposition that he should now veto the prohibition bill, since, if he does not, he, Noyes, can expose him to the world for a "nigger." Naturally, our hero rises above this awful bribe without a struggle, and shows his caller the door. But if here he was a little too good for human nature's representative, Mr. Sheldon soon makes up for that. The sweet Southern girl, now the governor's fiancée, who seems in some mysterious way to be always in his house, enters, and to her Morrow tells the awful truth, breaking off their engagement. But he instantly repents. No, he cries, he is the same as before; they love each other; it shall make no difference. And he seizes her roughly in his arms. The girl, overwhelmed with horror, as any girl would be, struggles to repulse him and fights him frantically. So this was her love, he shouts. It was n't half so great as the love his "nigger" grandmother gave her white master. He drives her hands behind her and kisses her madly. If Mr. Sheldon was aiming to show by this brutal, repulsive scene that "nigger blood" will out, he succeeded only too well. If that was not this purpose, the scene becomes unintelligible. At any rate, you are glad of the relief which comes from the arrival of a third person, the rush of the poor girl from the room, and the curtain.

When the cherubic face of the author appeared in answer to the plaudits of the audience at the first performance you marveled that he could have written it.

In the third (and last) act, Morrow first has an extended scene with Senator Long, author of the prohibition bill, friend of the negroes, who preaches wisely and at great length according to the best teachings of Booker T. Washington, and shows Morrow the way out of his perplexities. Then Noyes comes back, drunk, doubtless on his own whiskey. The bill has yet to be signed. It lies on the governor's desk. The scene here altogether too closely duplicates that in the earlier act. He threatens exposure. Morrow signs the bill under his very nose. And then the girl enters. She still loves Morrow, she tells him; she cannot live without him. This is a little too much to swallow. Where in that little feminine bundle of Southern conventions lay the strength of character (if strength is the right word!) to bring her to this? It was not there. Granted that she could still love the man after the brutal shame of his former conduct, she would have gone no farther than loving him in secret and in silence. But she had to come on in the last act, or so the stage conventions run, and there had to be a final scene between the lovers. Fortunately, Morrow in act three is quite a differ-

ent man from Morrow in act two. He treats her calmly and respectfully. He goes all over the ground again, explaining that he is now going down among his people to work for them, and that she cannot follow him there. The play ends with his going out on the balcony of the State House to address the people, to tell them his secret himself, thus forestalling the revelations Noyes is about to make in the newspapers.

Obviously, the emotional interest in this play is — or should be, rather — in the tragedy of the proud, ambitious Morrow, who wakes suddenly to find himself a “nigger,” an exile from his home and hopes, from his sweetheart and his dreams. Yet, as Mr. Sheldon has written it, and as it was played by Mr. Guy Bates Post in the part of Morrow, and by the other actors, the play is most poignant in its moments of sheer theatrical appeal, almost of melodrama, such as the suspense of the cross-examination of the old mammy and her cry of revelation, or the pursuit of the fugitive in act one. Between his interest in the suspense of his story and in the elucidation of the broader aspects of the negro question in the South, Mr. Sheldon neglected too much his chief figure, as a human being. Unless the figures live and suffer for the audience, unless their personal fate is followed, their minds and hearts felt as real, the



naturalistic drama of contemporary life can have but little value, after all. That is what makes its technique so difficult and so baffling. From the moment when Morrow learned of his birth, he became a rather nebulous figure, not suffering so much as listening to theories which were only said by the dramatist to have altered his character and point of view. And, it must be confessed, Mr. Post's dignified, "repressed," but monotonous and unemotional style of acting did not aid in the illusion.

Miss Annie Russell portrayed the sweet, conventional Southern girl with seemly and intelligent sweetness, though her acting is rather lost in the vast spaces of the New Theatre. Other character parts were excellently played, especially the old mammy by Miss Beverly Sitgreaves, the prohibition senator by Lee Baker, and the governor's secretary, a breezy young Southerner of a peculiarly ingratiating type, by Jacob Wendell, Jr., who betrays no traces of the amateur, unless it is his ability always to look like a gentleman. The play was mounted with that good taste which already has come to characterize the scenery at the New Theatre. The first act set was almost as beautiful, in its large way, as Willard Metcalf's "May Night," though of course the glimmering mystery of the white pillars could not be caught. At least the play was of, by and for Americans.

And the interest with which it was followed shows the place which exists for just such efforts.

## “DON” AND “LIZ, THE MOTHER”

NEW THEATRE, December 30, 1909

In “Don,” by Rudolph Besier the New Theatre furnished a second excellent performance of a first-class new play. Unlike the grave and thoughtful “Strife,” it is a gay, almost ironic, comedy, with just a touch of tears at the conclusion—salt to the feast. But it is like “Strife” in one respect, not very flattering to our national pride,—it is the work of an Englishman, and was first produced “commercially” in the Haymarket Theatre, London, where it enjoyed great success. The New Theatre’s experiments with untried American pieces have resulted in “The Cottage in the Air” and “The Nigger,” one a failure, the other falling short of satisfactory drama. The New Theatre is having its little object lesson in the difficulty of picking plays, and perhaps is learning sympathy with those managers who go abroad for tried successes. The lesson will do no harm, if it is not too bitter and discouraging.



"Don," as it was acted on the opening night, even in the vast spaces of the New Theatre became a living story, interesting, gayly ironic, endlessly amusing, human, touching. The boxes of the "diamond horseshoe" were in most cases not occupied by the founders; in some sat men and women without evening dress. There was no social distraction in the auditorium. The theatre has failed dismally as a social diversion, and therein, perhaps, lies the best hope of its success as a theatre. At "Don" the audience was democratic and interested in the play, not in itself. Good, honest laughter rose; good, honest applause. As the play rapidly disclosed itself as capital comedy, witty, shrewd, and full of character observation, and as the almost flawless ensemble arranged by George Foster Platt, the stage manager, and the excellent acting of every person in the cast began to make themselves felt, that indefinable atmosphere of interest and pleasure which attends success in the theatre spread through the auditorium. Cheerful faces were bent on the stage. Men and women spoke hopefully between the acts.

It would be as senseless to try to reproduce the charm of "Don" by narrating the skeleton of its story as it was to try to reproduce the charm of Henry Arthur Jones's "The Liars"

by that clumsy reportorial method. Indeed, Besier suggests Jones, without being in the least like him. "Don" finds its scenes in the house of an English Canon; and, against church conventions and worldly conventions, which are cleverly permitted to appear much the same, are contrasted the quixotic humanitarian impulses of the Canon's son, which are in turn cleverly permitted to appear at the end oddly like the Puritan heart of non-conformism. Whatever Mr. Besier's faith — if he has one — he has in "Don," a satirical comedy, written for the thoughtful beholder a truer and psychologically sounder "morality" than "The Passing of the Third Floor Back." And the triumph is, the audience does n't know it — or not until the next day's soberer thought, at any rate. He differs from Mr. Jones, then, in burying far deeper his ethical intent; if, indeed, there was such intent. Probably the ethical message resulted from the truthful outcome of a truthful story, told for its own sake. Mr. Jones, of course, does not write the passing of third floors back, either; but he still is palpably very dead in earnest, through all his fun. Mr. Besier is almost Gallic in his lightness. His wit is not acid. He runs gayly at times over the thin ice of farce, and fascinates you with his success in getting to the other bank without wetting his feet. He

suggests, too, a man who could make epigrams if he wanted to, but heroically refrains because his characters weren't that sort of people. How his Don would have spouted had Shaw written the play ! He gets his fun from his situations and from his characters, and always enough from his characters to slide over that thin ice of farce. And in the end his play plunges down to emotional sincerity and tenderness and wins cleansing tears. He is a born playwright. His is a fresh pen to reckon with.

The scheme of "Don" is at once simple and spiced, at once psychologically interesting and valuable and just Gallic enough to tickle the Saxon palate. Stephen Bonnington, son of the Canon, is called Don by his fiancée not because of his similarity to Don Juan, in spite of his good looks and his poetic gifts, but because he tilts at modern windmills like that other Spanish Don of old. He is one of those rare souls who go stubbornly ahead doing what they think is their duty to their fellows in spite of the world's opinions, and with a fine idealism which the world can never understand would pick up a harlot of the streets if she were willing to be helped, even if by so doing they lost their sweethearts and forfeited their family happiness. The Don of this play does n't quite do this. But he goes to a woman

in trouble, takes her away from her husband, and brings her to his father's and mother's house. On the way she falls sick, and he remains over night with her at a hotel, passing the time by her bedside nursing her. When he reaches home with this woman he is confronted by his father, the Canon, his mother (a conventional, weak-minded, rather intellectually helpless woman, who loves her boy out of all logic and is constantly batted from outraged conventional propriety to maternal affection like a helpless tennis ball over a net), his fiancée, a girl of charm and sense, his future mother-in-law, a woman of worldly wisdom and humor, and his future father-in-law, an irritable, conventional old army officer. They already have heard of his exploit, and when he walks calmly in with the woman and tells his mother to put her to bed upstairs, the various kinds and degrees of consternation and indignation manifested by the other characters make a scene of true comedy at once hilariously funny and keenly pleasurable as character observation. That is the first act. The second act is no less delicious. It is given over to the efforts of Don, always good natured and charming he is, too, to convince the others of the purity of his acts and motives. It is the great merit of this play that you both sympathize with Don, and would forgive him if he scornfully burst out against

this cross-examination, and you sympathize with the others, too, who certainly have good cause to suspect him, and certainly have good cause to be vexed at the worldly gossip which he will call down by his acts upon their heads. Verily, the path of the humanitarian is beset with thorns.

It must be admitted that Don, by his calm compromising of the lady at the hotel, rather overstepped the possible bounds of naïve humanitarian instincts. The men with the fibre of idealists have more common sense, after all. But that is the only flaw in Mr. Besier's fabric.

Don has n't got matters mended much when the woman's irate husband appears upon the scene. He is an uncouth and uncompromising non-conformist, one of the Plymouth Brethren. Those who have read Edmund Gosse's book, "Father and Son," will understand him perfectly. If a man of the spiritual fineness and delicate culture of the elder Gosse could be such a domestic tyrant, it is quite believable that this uneducated and burly fanatic, Thomsett, led his wife a hard life, especially after he found she had backslid to the Church of England. But the man loved her, madly, fanatically, as he loved his religion. Faith came to him "in a flash," he said, and so did love. He is rather a pathetic figure. Don refuses to give him back

his wife. He threatens with a pistol. The scene is at once intense and ironic. But the wife finds the solution. In a touching confession, that, as made by Miss Thais Lawton, brought tears, she tells how she has always loved Don since he first rescued her from death or worse in London; how she married Thomsett in the hope of finding in a home and children some repose; how his tyranny over her soul and her body revolted her; and finally how Don's relations to her had been always pure, those of a brother to his sister — for she says all who suffer are his brothers and sisters.

Again Thomsett sees the truth in a flash. His unbending Puritan idealism to the law as he interprets it, and Don's unbending idealism to his impulses of brotherhood, which leads him to disregard all law, make them brothers. A compromise, based on a new understanding and respect, is struck. There is growth in each man, and true growth. The wife goes back, you are sure, to kinder treatment and ultimate happiness. The husband's horizon is widened. And Don, probably without losing any of his enthusiastic impulses, has learned tact and wisdom. As for the rest, they have all been a little bewildered by the whirl of events jarring them out of their ruts of convention and moral habit. That is always good for commonplace folk, on the stage or in an audience or in the world.



Only the sensible sweetheart ends the play with a quaint little speculation. Will she, she wonders, have to forgive her Don these little tragic farces all her life? Let us hope so!

The acting and the staging of this piece were well-nigh flawless. It lies within the range of the New Theatre company. For instance, Matheson Lang, a bad Charles Surface, was natural, charming, easy, convincing as Don. Louis Calvert, who as Sir Peter Teazle lacked distinction and depth, as the Plymouth Brother husband, a modern character rôle not calling for distinction, displayed a rough sincerity of feeling that carried the last act up to the serious level. E. M. Holland was, of course, adequate for the Canon. Mrs. Dellenbaugh, as the Canon's wife, gave a capital satiric sketch of a certain type of conventional woman that is a terrible trial to live with, but excellent fun for an evening across the footlights. William McVay, who murdered the text of "Antony and Cleopatra," in the modern character part of the fussy, conventional old general was a delight ; so was Miss Sitgreaves as his worldly wise and witty wife ; and Miss Thais Lawton, totally without distinction as Lady Sneerwell, here was touching, sincere and effective. Miss Leah Bateman-Hunter, a very young actress from England, played the fiancée, and contrived to give the part an indefinable suggestion of



intellectual poise and real feeling, even when she sat for half an act silent in a chair. She is a young woman who will bear watching. The play was staged perfectly and went without a hitch. It was such a performance as any theatre might be proud of.

It remains to add that "Don" was preceded by a "curtain-raiser," bearing the atrocious title of "Liz, the Mother," written by the authors of "'op o' Me Thumb," once acted by Maude Adams. It, also, is a sketch of cockney slum life, which does n't get much of anywhere, is intended to be very touching, and is only rather sentimentally ridiculous. Miss Annie Russell and Miss Lawton were chiefly concerned in the performance. They went about the stage dropping their h's and hugging property babies. Both babies had the same father, which was interesting. One of the babies was dead, which was even more interesting. The mother of the dead baby — Miss Lawton — was the wife of this mutual father. She wanted to swap babies — a dead for a quick one. But Miss Russell, as Liz, refused, thereby suggesting her loyalty to papa. Her refusal, you were to assume, would cost her a home, as her family refused any longer to have the live and hungry infant around. Just why this maudlin affair was staged at the New Theatre is a mystery. However, "Don" soon made one forget it.

SALEM *VIA* SCANDINAVIA

NEW THEATRE, February 14, 1910

In its original form "The Witch" was a Scandinavian drama by H. Wiers-Jenssen, presumably about peasant life and superstitions; it was also probably a show piece for an actress. In its adapted form at the New Theatre it suggests nothing so much as a trip by Sardou to Salem, Massachusetts, where he was alike impressed with the blood-curdling dramatic possibilities of witchcraft persecutions in the year 1692 and depressed by the prevailing puritanism of the place. As a matter of fact, the English adaptation has been made by Hermann Hagedorn, an instructor in English in Harvard University, who enjoys some local celebrity as a poet in the regions round the Hub.

In transferring the scenes of "The Witch" from Scandinavia to Salem, Massachusetts, and transforming the characters from peasants to Puritans, something appears to have been lost; at least, something is not there after the transfer process which is more or less essential to a successful play — namely, interest, humanity, passion, life, charm, credibility and the like. If these things were not in the original, why produce it at all? If they were, why sacrifice them by the silly experiment of "adapting" the

drama into an American setting? If a foreign play is good enough to be played at all at the New Theatre, it is good enough to be played in the best possible translation, as it was conceived and written by its author. Fancy adapting Ibsen's "Hedda Gabler" to Harlem, or Sudermann's "Magda" to Evanston, Illinois! And if it is not good enough to be played at the New Theatre as its author wrote it, then it is n't good enough to be played at all. If the New Theatre is going to do anything for an increased understanding of foreign drama, it won't be by showing us mangled foreign drama; and if it is going to do anything for an increased understanding of native drama, it is most decidedly not by grafting a foreign plot and motives upon a native setting and calling the product American. Possibly there is a good play in Salem witchcraft, (there must be, since none has ever come out), but it will not be found by going to Salem via Norway and Sweden. You go seventeen miles northeast of Boston by train or trolley. This present play is neither one thing nor the other, neither continental drama nor American history. It is chiefly a waste of good human effort.

These words are not the quibble of a carping critic; they are not unimportant. The principle at stake is an important one, involving not only the question of artistic sincerity in the

treatment of foreign work, but also the still graver question of sincerity toward our own drama and our own history. The attempts to put the New England Puritan on the stage have not been many, considering the importance he played in our national history. Truth to tell, he was more admirable to read about and to be descended from than to watch and to live with, even for the space of an evening. But, if he was narrow, bigoted, harsh, introspective, the apotheosis of Calvinism, he was yet a very real person, a large, deep-smouldering, passionate man. He believed in God hard, and he believed in hell hard, in a personal devil. When the superstition of witchcraft, which has taken spasmodic hold on mankind from the most primitive ages up to the present — witness the “malicious animal magnetism” of the Christian Scientists of to-day — hit Salem, Massachusetts, in the last decades of the seventeenth century, the Puritan gave to this primitive superstition a profound religious sanction, and through all the fanatic excesses of that terrible time Salem witchcraft was a different, and, one may almost say, a more dignified thing than the witchcraft persecutions of the peasants of such a land as Scandinavia two centuries ago. It was so different that it does not rightfully belong as dramatic material to the Sardous of the stage. It belongs, rightfully, not to the stage at

all, but to the historians and students of anthropologic religious phenomena. But if the dramatist must tackle the Puritans of Salem, to win any measure of truth and reality he must treat them with profound respect.

Alas, we all know the Puritan who talks like a log of wood and acts like a poker, in our occasional plays and historical novels! In spite of Hawthorne, this superstition persists, like witchcraft itself. The Puritan mothers are all gloomy and depressed, presumably from living with the Puritan fathers, and the Puritan fathers are all unhuman beings with a vocabulary that never was on sea or land. Such a one Cotton Mather, the New England divine, is represented sometimes as being. Such are all the characters in "The Witch," when they are not palpably Scandinavians decked out in colonial costume. But listen to this passage from Cotton Mather's relation of his wife's death:

"When I saw to what a point of resignation I was now called of the Lord I resolved, with His help, therein to glorify Him. So two hours before my lovely consort expired I kneeled by her bedside and I took into my two hands a dear hand, — the dearest in the world. With her thus in my hands I solemnly and sincerely gave her up unto the Lord; and in token of my real resignation I gently put her out of my hands and laid away a most lovely

hand, resolving that I would never touch it more. This was the hardest and perhaps the bravest action that I ever did. She told me that she signed and sealed my act of resignation. And though before that she called for me continuously, she after this never asked for me any more."

You may fare far before you will find anything in the whole range of human expression more touchingly simple than this. Here is a man speaking, a man tender, devout, deep-hearted. And he was the very man who led the attack on witchcraft culminating in the Salem hangings in 1692.

That there was at that period, not only in New England but in Europe, a remarkable outcropping of what we would now call "psychic phenomena," there can be no doubt. So far as "The Witch," either in its original form or in Mr. Hagedorn's adaptation, tries to show that the so-called manifestations of witchcraft were really such phenomena, it is to be commended. But when the play, as it does in the adaptation, tangles up this explanation in a hopelessly unscientific and inexplicable manner with a crowd of ignoramuses in Puritan shovel hats, makes them not religious fanatics of spiritual power and intellectual force and even of deep human feeling, but mean, snarling, persecuting bullies, and interweaves a love



story wherein there is no true tenderness and no real passion, it is most certainly not to be commended. It is bad drama, it is worse history, and it is worst of all in its belittling of our national past.

"The Witch" tells the story of a young woman of foreign birth married to an elderly Salem minister. The chase of a witch hag is early shown, and we are made acquainted with the fact that the elderly pastor, Absalom Hathorne, has a weak heart. Gabriel Hathorne, a grown son by a former marriage, comes back and falls in love with his father's wife, and she with him. The wife yields. Then she learns that she has psychic powers, through learning that her mother had them and should have been hung for a witch. To be sure, the only indication she gives of possessing these powers is that when she wants Gabriel to come to her, he walks into the room, having but recently stepped out into the yard! She follows up this remarkable feat by wishing her husband dead, and tells him she has given herself to Gabriel. The shock is too much for his weak heart. He dies.

But his Puritan mother suspects, or at least she hates. Bringing in all the neighbors, she charges Joan, the wife, with being a witch, with killing her husband by satanic aid and seducing his son. Joan is told to take the test, to lay her



hand on the forehead of the corpse. She does so. This is the one really fine moment of the play — a virtuoso moment for the actress. As her hand touches the corpse, there comes over Joan the terrible influence in the air, she is literally hypnotized by the frenzied condition of the public mind into a belief of her guilt. She “confesses.” She becomes a lunatic. The curtains close on this horrid spectacle.

In the drama as it came to the stage on Monday night there was no emotional appeal whatever in the Puritan husband, nor in any of the Puritan men and women. They were n’t men and women. They were conventional lay figures. Illicit love had to be brought in to give the passion to the piece. And to bring about the charges of witchcraft against the heroine not the true motive of religious zeal was evoked but a mother’s savage spirit of revenge for her son. This mother was not Puritan at all. She never existed in Salem. She was transplanted out of Scandinavian peasant life, or out of Guy de Maupassant. It was all quite false and futile.

Mme. Bertha Kalich joined the New Theatre company to create the rôle of “Goodwife” Joan. (Every woman is a good wife in the Puritan drama!) Her ample voice and large, free, plastic style of gesticulation, pose and facial play, fit well the vast spaces of this

theatre, where only a large style will reach the galleries; and she can, furthermore, suggest with great poignancy both illicit passion smouldering fiercely and tortured suspense. But she was finest in that finest, and final, moment of the play, when, beside the corpse of her husband, the battering of superstition overthrows her reason and her resistance and she becomes a drooling lunatic, foredoomed to the horrid black tree on Witches' Hill. In an unreal play, no player can quite bring a part to life, but Mme. Kalich did as much with this one as it is probable the play permitted. For the rest, they had stilted lines to speak, and they spoke them with a wearisome sing-song which would seem to suggest that Methodism came into the world a century earlier than we had supposed.

Such is the stage Puritan. It is no wonder he was persecuted in England. There was one exception, the fat clerk of the Salem Court, played by William McVay. He was a bibulous person who developed a distinct vein of skepticism toward witchcraft with the increase of his vinous cheer. This is the first time we had recognized a connection between rationalism and rum. It was a cheering thought. We sought the basement during the next intermission.

BRIDEGROOMS AND THE FRENCH  
REVOLUTION

NEW THEATRE, February 28, 1910

A strange thing happened at the New Theatre on February 28, 1910. The subscribers of that institution found themselves occupying the proud position of dogs, usually reserved for the audiences in New Haven, Connecticut, or Providence, Rhode Island. John Mason and a supporting company which did not include a single member of the New Theatre organization were allowed to try out a play which is not to become part of the New Theatre repertoire. As the play, "A Son of the People," stiffly translated from the German translation of Sophus Michaelis' Danish original, "A Revolutionary Wedding," was of slight interest and less value, and as the supporting company was neither good in itself nor at home on the New Theatre stage, the subscribers were not gainers, however much Mr. Mason and his manager may have benefited.

Doubtless the truth of the matter is that the managers of the New Theatre had no new play ready for themselves and felt obliged to put forward some novelty. But that does not excuse them. If, with the equipment and com-

pany they possess, they cannot make new productions once in two weeks when necessary, then they are but poorly fitted as yet for the task of management. To put upon their stage, at the height of their first season, a poor play and a second-rate company, as a stop gap, is a horrible confession of inefficiency. And to bore still further the already sorely tried subscribers to the New Theatre is the worst thing which could happen to that institution. Its prevailing note now is too frequently dulness. To add incompetence is almost a crime.

“A Son of the People” is ostensibly a play of the French revolution. The familiar ingredients are all present — an army of citizen supers, wearing tri-colored breeches and the republican cockade, a band to play the Marseillaise off stage and two or three aristocrats to take out and shoot, their arms held behind them by the citizen supers. But “A Son of the People” is spiced with an idea, not an idea, perhaps, which one would expound at an evangelical mid-week meeting, but one which might very well serve for entertaining drama. It is the idea of a woman who finds on her wedding day that her bridegroom is a coward, being unable to forget in her presence that he is to be shot in the morning, and who turns from him to a man who is willing to be shot in the morning for the sake of the endearments her husband forgoes.

Possibly this is an odd kind of a lady, and possibly it is a romantic and supersusceptible man who would be willing to lay down his life to take the bridegroom's place, particularly as he never saw the lady till supper time. But give that idea to D'Annunzio or G. B. Shaw — the old Shaw — and they would make something of it; the one something tense and suggestive of a leak in the sewer pipe, perhaps; the other an acid comedy. Mr. Michaelis, however, has been able to make only a long-winded, old-fashioned, turgid, badly constructed melodrama. Of course the idea, *per se*, has nothing whatever to do with the French revolution. The Marseillaise has no more real significance than the American flag in a G. M. Cohan comedy.

Here is the story of "A Son of the People": Alaire de L'Estoile, daughter of an aristocrat, living in her ancestral chateau near Condé, had been pledged by her parents to the Marquis des Tressailles. Almost at the rise of the curtain he comes to marry her. The time is April, 1793; Condé is near the border, and though the marquis is an Emigré, one of the White Dragoons, he comes thus far in safety with a French and Austrian escort. Left alone with his bride for the night — he must be away to fight in the morning — the kissing is interrupted by the distant strains of the Marseil-

laise. In come the conventional republicans, and Ernest, the marquis, is about to be taken out and shot when Citizen Arron, one of the leaders, interposes, suggesting that he be shot at six in the morning. Give him his night with his bride, says the kindly Arron. To this the commander, the commissioner of public safety, consents. A guard is placed around the house, and the lovers are thus left to "a wedding upon a scaffold." The bridegroom does not relish the situation. He is afraid to die. The thought of death puts all thoughts of his bride out of his head. He storms and weeps in abject cowardice. The bride is somewhat piqued. Evidently she has been looking forward to this momentous occasion with pleasant expectation. She thinks her husband should forget death for his duty. When Citizen Arron enters the room she pleads with him to save her husband's life, however, and offers him "herself" if he will contrive an escape. Citizen Arron turns out to be a susceptible person, extremely so. At the touch of her hand he is overpowered. He declares he is turning traitor to the republic as she presses his fingers. He turns traitor. He exchanges uniforms with the cringing Ernest, who makes good his escape, as you are told by a maid servant watching from a window. Left to die in place of the husband, gallant Citizen Arron turns toward the lady for his reward.



But, having achieved her purpose, the lady has no intention — at least, she says she has n't, but you are not wholly convinced — of fulfilling her promise. She goes into her room and bars the door. Citizen Arron bides his time and takes a nap in a Louis XVI chair. The lady comes back. She wants to know if it is really true that he will be shot by his own men in the morning. He assures her that he will be, and his own conscience would make him insist upon it, anyhow. She is still skeptical, so he sends for the commissioner, and, while the lady hides behind a screen, he tells the commissioner what he has done. That functionary assures him that he may be quite at ease in his mind — the execution will be carried out. Departing, he is heard doubling the sentry.

Then the lady comes forth. Her husband, facing death in the morning, had forgotten her. This other man, this sturdy Citizen Arron, at one touch of her hand, had jauntily accepted death for her promises. Could a lady be unmoved by such proof of devotion? “I love you !” cries the Lady Alaire, precipitating herself upon the now aristocratically clad republican bosom of the Citizen Arron.

The third, and last, act takes place at the unwitching hour of five A. M. Citizen Arron enters from the chamber. He is now in a funk of terror, too — quite as fearful of death as the



other man had been. But the lady is still asleep and does not know it. Indeed, she does n't find it out — and a good stroke of ironic comedy is lost. She rises to beg him to fly by a secret passage which for some strange reason she did not remember the night before, but he refuses. He must expiate what he has done to the republic. Then enter the soldiers. They are about to shoot when the commissioner forbids, crying that he pardons Citizen Arron. But Citizen Arron, like a true dramatic critic, spurns the happy ending. He runs to the open window and the sentries outside shoot him down. Then the band plays the Marseillaise again. All is o'er.

It may be gathered from this brief epitome of the play that its love motives suggest, as Henry James once said of the works of Gabriel D'Annunzio, "the most mimetic department of a menagerie." Of course, the marquis had married the lady by parental assignment, as it were, and her love for him was not a burning and true passion. Still, the abrupt transfer of her affections between sunset and late supper time from the aristocrat to Citizen Arron, whom she had never seen before in her life, could hardly be explained even by the fact that the marquis was a coward in the face of death and Citizen Arron was n't, unless she was at least a second cousin of a D'Annunzio heroine. But Mr. D'Annunzio

did n't write "A Son of the People." It was written by an evidently belated disciple of Sardou. That is sufficient to say of it. It has no value as a picture of the French revolution, nor as a study in psychology; and it is not well enough constructed to interest as a "well made play" — it has not the compactness and speed.

To act this piece with any effectiveness would require a romantic, physical dare-devil as Arron, and a Bernhardt as the lady. John Mason, who played Arron, is an expert and polished player, with an elocutionary method equal even to the trying spaces of the New Theatre. But he does not suggest romantic dare-deviltry nor consuming youthful physical passion. Miss Katherine Kaelred played the lady. She, it may be recalled, recently amused the sophisticated as the rag and the bone and the hank of hair in the hifalutin drool, "A Fool There Was." At the New Theatre it appeared that she was trying to make the Lady Alaire a sweet virgin filled with new love for Citizen Arron. The part is not entirely open to that interpretation, if it is to be humanly comprehensible. However, the rôle is full of Sardou moments — pleading, seduction, defiance, scorn, love, the whole bag of tricks —, and poor Miss Kaelred tried to Sardoudle. She made but a sorry job of it.

## "SISTER BEATRICE" AND "BRAND"

NEW THEATRE, March 14, 1910

There are certain things in the dramatic world which seem to have become invested with a portentous and depressing solemnity. Among them are religion, poetic drama, and the New Theatre.

Actually, of course, religious faith brings more often happiness and peace than gloom — at least, to its possessor. A soul and a sense of humor have more than once been known to dwell in the same body. Actually, of course, the poetic drama has its lights and shadows no less than prose; goes to the same mixed tempo. It is not poetry because it is sing-sung at a funeral pace. The difference between Mozart and Cohan is not one of tempo, nor between Shakespeare and Channing Pollock. And actually, of course, the New Theatre, if it is to succeed and fill a place in popular interest and good will, can no more afford to bore its audiences than any other theatre.

These remarks are inspired by the production at the New Theatre of the fourth act of Ibsen's "Brand" (condensed) and of Maeterlinck's morality play — written as a libretto — "Sister Beatrice." The portentous solemnity of the traditional stage attitude

toward representations of religion and of poetic drama was not lacking, and the tendency toward ponderous heaviness of the New Theatre was exemplified by placing on one evening's bill two pieces without contrast or relief, both ending in death, and unduly straining the attention of the auditors.

The present writer once visited the rooms of a famous runner and saw a vast array of cups and medals. On one shelf were the firsts, on another the seconds and thirds. Pointing to the latter the runner said, "Those are my failures." It is in this sense that the New Theatre's production of "Sister Beatrice" may be called a failure. With the one woman best fitted to play the title part, Miss Edith Wynne Matthison, with the most beautiful scenery shown on the New York stage in the writer's memory, with a company quite adequate for all the needs of the minor rôles, with all needful mechanical equipment and accessories of costume, the production just missed its full effect, just failed of sustaining a mood, which at first it created. And it failed because Maeterlinck's special stage directions were deliberately ignored, and instead of playing the second act in a mood of joyousness, under morning sunshine, the act was played in semi-darkness in a mood of conventional religious dolorousness. Thus the whole play lacked variety, shading ; but, still

more, it thus was tinged with artificiality and lost its naïve and simple grace.

To all students of modern drama the play is doubtless familiar. It is based on one of the old Mary myths of the mediæval church — the myth used so touchingly by Adelaide Proctor in “A Legend of Provence” (a poem in which the psychology is more searching than in Maeterlinck’s play), and by John Davidson in “A Ballad of a Nun.” Maeterlinck has made a simple, straightforward narrative for the stage out of the story, which has little of the Maeterlinckian “static drama” about it and keeps even in the stiff English translation of Bernard Miall the naïve quality of legend.

The first act is brief and entirely concerned with Sister Beatrice’s flight with Bellidor, her lover. The curtain rises, disclosing the high, bare stone walls of the convent, with the huge entrance doors, now barred, in the center and the little nun praying in the dim light of the lamp before the statue of the Virgin. Her prayer discloses her innocence, her love for Bellidor, her reluctance to desert the convent, her pitiful perplexity. Then comes a knocking. She throws open the doors and Bellidor stands there in golden mail. Again she prays the Virgin for a sign bidding her stay; but no sign is given, so she hangs her mantle and veil on the grille and goes out with her lover.

The second act opens on a vacant stage. It is now full morning. The statue of the Virgin comes to life, puts on Sister Beatrice's costume, and goes about her tasks. First she distributes gifts to the poor, which are transformed as she takes them out of an alms basket into wonderful cloths of gold. Then the abbess and sisters come, discover the vacant pedestal, see the Virgin's robes under those of Sister Beatrice, and think the little nun has robbed the sacred image. They take her into the chapel to scourge her. But there a miracle comes to pass. Angelic voices peal out, flowers rain down, blinding lights flash, and the astonished nuns stagger back upon the stage, crying that the Virgin has gone up to heaven and left Sister Beatrice in her place.

In the third act, twenty years later, Sister Beatrice comes back, old and worn with sin. She returns in the dawn-dark of act one save that the scene is now winter. The Virgin is once more on her pedestal, and Sister Beatrice finds her old mantle hanging, as she left it, on the grille. She puts it on for warmth. The nuns come out and find her dying. Their compassion amazes her. She tries to tell them of her sins, but they think her confession is prompted by the devil struggling with her soul. She cannot make them believe that she ever left the convent in all these



twenty years. The Virgin has protected her memory, in her infinite tenderness and mercy. So Sister Beatrice dies as one of the saints.

Miss Matthison possesses the beautiful, expressive face, the tender, deep voice, and the plastic, graceful bearing perfectly to realize such a part in such a legend. The wistful innocence of her opening prayer struck the mood at once, and when she threw open the door to disclose Prince Bellidor in golden mail standing against a night-blue landscape where purple headlands showed through a ghostly fringe of young birches and the morning star twinkled in the sky, the audience gasped for very joy of the picture, a picture as illusive, as other-worldly, as persuasive as any pre-Raphaelite canvas.

But the stage directions indicate that the lovers go out into the dawn. There was no dawn at the New Theatre. The curtain was not even dropped. Miss Matthison made her way into the niche where the statue of the Virgin stood, under cover of darkness, and came to life by lamplight. In subsequent speeches, of course, all the references to the sun had to be cut out. When she distributed the garments to the poor it was in a melancholy manner, and none of the poor "rushed off with glad cries," as indicated by the text. There was none of the Virgin's joy of charity. And this, proba-



bly, was because there was no joy of sunlight and because Miss Matthison had not been asked to play the scene joyously.

Why was there no sunlight? Simply in order that a light might be cast up from the alms basket to illuminate the garments as the Virgin lifted them out. But this could have been accomplished by putting the basket in a heavy shadow, surely. Later, when the nuns discover the supposed theft from the image, Miss Matthison's face was illumined with a benign patience, a sweet, glad loveliness, that was anything but dolorous. Again, when the nuns burst back from the miracle in the chapel, the reason for the New Theatre's plan of playing this act in darkness became still more apparent. The shower of flowers was indicated by dropping tinsel confetti down through a blaze of calcium light, and the miracle was further pictured by a mighty escape of steam, quite like a Wagnerian opera. After all, such mechanical contrivances have little part in so simple a legend. They make it seem artificial. Let flowers be scattered by unseen hands, let hidden voices peal, and let the faces of the nuns and still more the face of Miss Matthison — undimmed by escaping steam — express the miracle, and your audience will believe it much more readily. Moreover, the bright atmosphere of sunlight is absolutely needed in this second act to symbolize

the joy and mercy of the Virgin as well as to relieve the monotony of the play and afford the necessary contrast. The old myth is not truly rendered without the touch of morning freshness and the golden light of the new day. This is even more the case since Maeterlinck wrote "Sister Beatrice" as a libretto, depending on orchestral tone coloring to heighten many of his effects. To the eye a dark stage and spot lights produce the exact opposite of the effect intended here, which is joy and ecstatic wonder.

"Sister Beatrice" was preceded by a production of act four of "Brand," from which the long scene between Brand and the mayor was omitted, since it is unintelligible without the rest of the play. Some people seemed to find what remained of the act unintelligible; and it is not, of course, fully clear, since it is but one more cruel episode in Brand's spiritual struggle. Yet, even if you do not know that the little dead baby out under the snow was killed that Brand could school his will and give God "all or nothing," and are not certain whether this stern preacher is meant as man or monster, still the act tingles with a dramatic life of its own, and is sufficiently harrowing. Possibly at such a house as the New Theatre it ought to be safe to assume, also, that the audience is not unfamiliar with Ibsen's poem. There is conti-

mental precedent for playing this act separately, at any rate.

As to the production, little need be said. Miss Annie Russell played Agnes, and she whined and moaned quite ineffectually, while Lee Baker, as Brand, delivered his speeches in a kind of sing-song, and lacked the suggestion of spiritual fanaticism necessary to a plausible picture of the part. It was a doleful procedure, not a tragic nor significant one. It caused no cries for the rest of the play.

## “THE WINTER’S TALE” WITHOUT SCENERY

NEW THEATRE, March 28, 1910

The New Theatre began its first season with the dullest performance of “Antony and Cleopatra” ever witnessed, but with scenery of great magnificence. It closed its first season (so far as the regular company was concerned) with a fine and spirited performance of “The Winter’s Tale,” with practically no scenery at all. Thus we see that actors do have their uses.

There have been many attempts in recent years to reproduce Elizabethan stage conditions. Among the most successful from the strictly historical point of view were possibly those at Harvard College, where most recently

Miss Adams acted "Twelfth Night." The stage at Sanders Theatre thrusts out into the auditorium, and it was there possible to construct reproductions of the Elizabethan boxes, running round on the sides and almost behind the stage, which were filled with students dressed as young London blades of the period. But, on the other hand, neither at Harvard nor in the Ben Greet revivals, was the probable richness of the Elizabethan stage reproduced. Rich in scenery it was not, though there was possibly a little scenery placed in the alcove to suggest location. But recent research has pretty clearly proved that it was rich in costuming, and that the solid architectural background of balconies, pillars, and tapestries was impressively luxurious. The Elizabethans certainly liked bright and beautiful things, and the Elizabethan theatre could certainly afford them. Shakespeare was not the only actor-manager who retired wealthy. The Elizabethan playhouse was not a barn, then, nor so caparisoned. By staging "The Winter's Tale" against a rich background of mediæval tapestries and architectural detail, and by dressing the players richly with costumes of Shakespeare's time, the New Theatre has relieved the so-called Elizabethan stage of that bareness and poverty we have associated with it, warming it into sensuous appeal.

Of course, in Shakespeare's time, boys and men played all the female parts. Of course, the stage, however large, was restricted for purposes of grouping by the presence of spectators and the lack of a proscenium frame. Of course, the performance took place by daylight, and the acting was probably on a far different key of robust oratory. In a sense, it is impossible now to reproduce the Elizabethan stage, even had we fuller knowledge of it. Much ink has been spilled over the question whether it is worth while trying. Some critics point out, quite truly, that Shakespeare would have utilized scenery if he had possessed it. No doubt he would. But, if he had possessed scenery, he would have written his plays in five scenes instead of fifteen, and he would have dispensed with most of his lyric embellishments of descriptive poetry. Let us rejoice that he did not possess scenery, that there was no Belasco in Elizabeth's England! The real object of the modern reversion to the supposed Elizabethan stage is not to make an absolutely accurate archæological reproduction, but so to mount the play that it may be acted in its textual integrity, and to create illusion by the acting and the verse, not by means which were foreign to Shakespeare. If such a modern revival preserves the text of the play and creates the illusion, without belittling the work, without making it seem tamer

or less poetic, then it has accomplished its purpose well.

And the New Theatre's revival of "The Winter's Tale" does just that.

Miss Adams' revival of "Twelfth Night," by the bareness of the stage — and also by the quality of the acting — belittled the play. This present revival of "The Winter's Tale," by the simple richness of its tapestried setting and still more by the glowing, harmonious colors of its costumes and the uniform dignity of its acting, preserves all the rich, romantic glamor of the fable, while adding the immeasurable advantage of swiftness of movement, absence of "waits," the illusion of verse rather than scenery, and textual completeness, so that the story seems almost for the first time on the modern stage unified and comprehensible. To a spectator with imagination the illusion is much more nearly perfect without scenery than with it. To such a spectator Shakespeare's pen was more potent than any scene painter's brush. To a mind utterly dependent on the habitual aids to illusion this revival may prove unsatisfactory. To the mind capable of doing its own work it will prove a treat. The real quarrel over the revival of the Elizabethan stage is, after all, a quarrel between these two types of mind.

But of course the acting of the New Theatre company has much to do with the satisfactory



result of this revival. It is easily the best acting in a classic seen at the playhouse during the season. It is more unified, pitched to a higher key; that key is more the key of romantic robustness — though still not quite robust enough; and the difficulties of delivering blank verse are more successfully overcome. The presence in the cast as Hermione of Miss Edith Matthison naturally has the largest share in this happy outcome. Next to Miss Matthison, Miss Rose Coghlan, an actress long ago trained in such rôles, playing Paulina, lifts the drama into the regions of high romantic poetry. Little Miss Bateman-Hunter, the incarnation of youthful beauty and innocence, ranks next perhaps, for though she cannot yet read the immortal speech about the “daffodils that come before the swallow dares,” and make it tell in all its haunting loveliness and magic, yet her Perdita is artless without simper, charming without affectation, as utterly girlish as most of the Perditas of the famous actresses who “double” the rôle with Hermione have been theatrically sophisticated.

Miss Matthison's queen is, vocally and dramatically, regal and beautiful. The nobility of her bearing, the pure pathos of her protestations of chastity, the tragic grief of the mother at the supposed loss of her child, and finally the benignity and sweetness of wifely forgiveness



expressed in her face and her deep, poignant voice when the statue comes to life, are largely, simply and splendidly expressed. Her elocution, of course, is a treat, and her beauty when she stands in flowing gray robes, under her crown upon the pedestal, is something that once seen cannot soon be forgot. No less broadly effective is the Paulina of Miss Coghlan, and splendid in its suggestion of power in reserve. These women of the cast would alone make it notable.

But, on the masculine side, Ferdinand Gottschalk as the clown and Albert Bruning as Autolycus contribute comic portraits which are at once drawn broadly and without coarseness, which are at once full of rollicking humor and keen characterization. Henry Kolker as Leontes suffers from his unfortunate nasal speech, and some of the other men are too fearful of "letting themselves go." But on the whole they, too, are in the swift, romantic Elizabethan spirit of this revival, if as yet somewhat tamely so.

The play has been staged by Louis Calvert substantially without cuts in the text and with only one intermission, well placed before the first scene that shows Perdita grown to girlhood. His groupings, aided by the beautiful costumes, are particularly delightful, and he has staged the dance of the shepherds and shep-

herdesses in such wise that it seems a true expression of peasant joy, not a "stunt" of the dancing teacher. He keeps the players well to the front of the stage—which has been built out over the orchestra pit at the New Theatre, a great aid to the acoustics—and he keeps well to the front also the primary motive of this revival, the swift, illusive, poetic narration of Shakespeare's romantic fable. Here is the play substantially as Shakespeare conceived it, and how much lovelier and more persuasive and simple a thing it is than the usual traffic of the stage when modern "spectacle" holds sway!

### "BEETHOVEN — A DRAMATIC BIOGRAPHY"

NEW THEATRE, April 11, 1910.

"Beethoven," described as a "dramatic biography," written by René Fauchois and translated into English prose—rhymed and unrhymed—by Henry Grafton Chapman, was enacted at the New Theatre after the regular season, with Donald Robertson of Chicago playing the title part. "Beethoven" had been originally scheduled for production in season by the New Theatre Company, but the subscribers were spared that affliction.

For "Beethoven" — though it is described as a "success" in Paris and elsewhere on the Continent — is a stage work which is not likely to interest anyone but the lovers of the great composer and his works, having absolutely no dramatic interest of its own; and it is not likely to interest them because it makes trivial and even a little ridiculous a mighty musician, and so is essentially false. Divided into three acts, the play shows Beethoven first in Vienna in 1809, at the height of his fame, and in love with the fair Giulietta Guiccardi, who informs him of her betrothal to another. Act two shows him some years later, in love now with Bettina Brentano, who in her turn informs him that she is about to be married to another. It also shows him haunted by the fear of his growing deafness; and, finally, in the one really effective scene of the entire fabric, this deafness comes vividly upon him while he is rehearsing the string quartet No. 9. He orders the musicians to play louder. He seizes a fiddle from one of them, yanks the bow over the strings, utters a heart-breaking cry as he dashes the instrument to the floor, and falls weeping in a heap. Probably the brooding genius of the Ninth Symphony and the great quartets never acted in just this theatric way, but we must not expect too much of the drama.

In the last act it is the white-haired, bowed

and dying Beethoven whom we see, broken-hearted by the ingratitude of his nephew, Karl, and only consoled by the vision of his nine symphonies, which come to him in the shape of nine young ladies clad in white, while an invisible voice describes each one in atrocious verse, and the New Theatre orchestra plays a theme from the score. A spotlight is cast upon each one of these "nine sweet symphonies" (as Rossetti might have called them), as her theme is sounded. It is all rather suggestive of Coney Island spectacle. Isadora Duncan, gyrating barefoot to the measures of the Seventh Symphony, belittled it less than this exhibition.

All through the formless, ambling, undramatic fabric, however, as seen at the New Theatre, the great genius of Beethoven was belittled. Ever and anon the composer was shown running his fingers through his hair, beating time with his hands, or jotting feverishly in a notebook, while the invisible orchestra played this or that famous theme from his works. This was supposed, no doubt, to indicate the descent of the divine afflatus. His love affairs were so fragmentarily indicated and treated in so trivial a manner that they tended to make him ridiculous; indeed, the audience tittered at the second one. And his outbursts of temper or of self-confident independence seemed the promptings of conceit, not of genius.

Partly these things were due to the playwright, partly to the actor, but still more to the nature of the subject. Beethoven was a genius whose drama was subjective. He carried within his own nature his joys and his tragedies. His loves meant much to him, because he glorified the objects of his adoration. His life was a long struggle between accomplishment and vision. His tragedy of deafness was one which only he could fully comprehend, because only he could hear with that inward ear the harmonies which haunted him and which he so mightily yearned to test upon the instruments of his orchestra. To make dramatic stuff of such subjective material as this is the task for a genius scarcely less great as a playwright than Beethoven as a composer. M. Fauchois is not that genius.

And to invest the stage impersonation of such a world figure as Beethoven with the dignity, the suggestion of power, the serene self-poise successfully to convert a small man's conceit into a great man's prophetic utterances, requires an actor of no less a stature than Mansfield or Irving. Mr. Robertson is not that actor. His performance was conspicuous for its clarity of enunciation and for its picturesque solidity. But it was totally deficient in the quality of sympathy; it inspired no pity for the suffering Beethoven, being hard and a trifle

monotonous; and it was deficient, too, in the suggestion of the majesty of great inspiration, the dignity of genius. This play and this performance of it have not so entirely failed as have certain attempts in the past to make stage material out of the lives of Beethoven and Mozart. But they have added nothing to popular appreciation of the master and his works; they have not made him a more human figure, nor his works more fraught with emotional significance. Failing in this, it is hard to see that the New Theatre production of "Beethoven" has accomplished anything at all.

## Part II





## “THE EASIEST WAY”

BELASCO'S STUYVESANT THEATRE, January 19, 1909

THE real friends of David Belasco for several seasons have not been those persons who gave him fulsome praise and accorded him untempered adulation. They have been those who tried to point out that by his failure to ally himself with dramatists who possess real ideas he was letting the stage advance beyond him and losing his position as a leader. And these real friends were the ones who rejoiced most heartily at the Stuyvesant Theatre, in New York, when they found that Mr. Belasco had allied himself at last with an author who possesses ideas and an uncompromising, almost brutal passion for truth, Eugene Walter, author of “Paid in Full.” On January 19, 1909, Mr. Belasco mounted in the heart of the Tenderloin Mr. Walter's latest play, a remorseless study of a pitiful and only too common phase of Tenderloin life, called “The Easiest Way.” He mounted the play with all his remarkable skill in the ordering of accessories and the manipulation of atmosphere and acting. Yet it was

acted letter for letter as Mr. Walter wrote it. As a result one of the most significant American plays of recent years was performed in a manner worthy of it. "The Easiest Way" is an American "Iris." Eugene Walter has shown himself in this piece the American Pinero. The same sense for theatrical effectiveness, the same uncompromising irony of truth, and the same preoccupation with the grimmer side of the middle world of urban life — the "half-world" of the French — is apparent in "The Easiest Way" as in "Iris." And, too, in Mr. Walter's newest piece there is an increasing attention to literary style, to distinction of dialogue. One fault he has that he will, perhaps, get over, and must get over before his style will be acceptable to the more fastidious. He, like the young Kipling, too much enjoys shocking his hearers with raw remarks and needless profanity — truthful and in character, no doubt, but really ineffective. Barring this, "The Easiest Way" is written with dramatic fitness and distinction, and it marks a long stride forward for its author, and for Mr. Belasco. It places Mr. Walter as a leader among our dramatists, and it restores Mr. Belasco temporarily, at least, to a place of leadership among our managers.

That the play will shock the prurient, the hypocritical folk who close up "Mrs. Warren's

Profession" and enjoy any sort of libidinous musical "show," there is no doubt. But morality or immorality in the drama is a matter of intention and method. You can tell the truth about immorality and be highly moral. You can also tell no truths at all and be highly indecent. It is perfectly evident that Mr. Walter has written his play with a burning purpose to tell very unpleasant truths in a very uncompromising way for the sake of opening some people's eyes, and that he has told truths nobody who knows anything about the Tenderloin will attempt to deny. Yet they are truths unfortunately applicable to other places than the Tenderloin. The play has universal appeal.

The story of the play is simple. It is that of a slim, pretty, frail, not immoral, but unmoral girl who escapes from an early marriage to the stage, and from that to a rich broker who "protects" her. Then she falls in love one summer with a young reporter in Denver, who goes to Goldfield to try to strike a fortune while she comes East to live a "straight" life till he can come and claim her. The second act shows her out of a job, in a horrible boarding-house, down to her last cent. She is an incapable actress, one of the kind to whom certain managers only give parts when there is an "angel" backing them; and

this style of manager is rudely pictured. The girl is not strong fibred enough to stick out the fight. She goes back to the broker. But he, who is not painted in total black but with the mixed colors of life, dictates a letter to her to send to her lover. She promises to send it, but she does n't. She goes on writing to her lover as before, after she is living again with the broker.

Of course, the lover comes East suddenly to claim her, and the last two acts are ordered with breathless suspense and masterly development. The girl, incapable of telling the truth, lies first to the broker and then to the lover. The latter, believing her profession of innocence, is about to take her West with him when a key clicks in the lock. The door opens. The broker enters. No more effective moment has been devised in recent drama. It is the girl's total inability to tell the truth, her total failure to grasp the real meaning of morality, that precludes any forgiveness from the lover. She threatens to shoot herself. He tells her to go ahead, well knowing that she has not the courage. When he has gone, she wails in utter despair for a moment, and then calls feverishly for her hat, announcing that she is going over to Rector's "to raise hell," and the curtain falls.

This story is the story of a life that was

of no consequence (so far as a human life is ever of no consequence), but a life that brought woe to others and dull misery to itself. This life goes on after the final curtain falls, goes on to a conclusion more terrible than the incidents of the play. This poor girl was a pitifully weak vessel tossed on a cruel and relentless sea. She is presented with searching truth, and her fate becomes important because it is the fate of her kind. A certain type of broker, a certain type of musical comedy manager, the powers that prey in the Tenderloin, battled against her in her hopeless and lonely struggle for an ethical salvation. Doubtless somewhere she had a soul, but there was nobody to reach it, because there was nobody to feed her body except at her body's price. This is the story of the Tenderloin. This is the story of too many department stores. This is the terrible tale of prostitution. Perhaps Mr. Walter would have us believe this girl was predestined from birth for her fate; but we cannot believe it. She was a woman. She was laid, a living sacrifice, on the altar of the Tenderloin — that gay region of lamps and theatres, cabs and cafés, mirth and merriment. Produced in the heart of this region, "The Easiest Way" is like an ugly death's head suddenly revealed behind a grinning mask of comedy.

There were but six people in the cast. Fran-

ces Starr played the part of the Girl, and played it as "The Rose of the Rancho" hardly led one to hope. Her frail, small prettiness fitted it well, and her somewhat artificial attempts to be emotional in the larger scenes fitted with a curious aptness the half unreality of the girl's emotions. For the most part she was subdued, repressed, realistic. Where she chiefly failed was in suggesting from the first that the girl had not been roused to real moral feeling. Her first two acts suggested a force of character that made the last two a trifle contradictory. The other parts were played with flawless skill, in a key of stern, quiet realism in keeping with the drama. Joseph Kilgour in the difficult part of the broker made it a living character full of lights and shades of goodness and licentiousness. And William Sampson as an old-time theatrical "advance agent" was a treat. The part is as "fat" as that he played in "The Witching Hour," and as funny. Yet he made it wistfully tender, too. That there is so much humor in the play but accentuates for the thoughtful the underlying tragedy. For those who are not thoughtful it will undoubtedly contribute to the great popular success that awaits "The Easiest Way."



## MISS NETHERSOLE AS MUCKRAKER

SAVOY, April 26, 1909

Miss Olga Nethersole has emerged at the Savoy Theatre in New York in what the programme somewhat optimistically denominated "A great American drama," called "The Writing on the Wall," the work of William J. Hurlbut, the author of "The Fighting Hope," Blanche Bates's play for the current season. Notice that the programme said, "A great American drama." Even a programme does not quite dare to predict in advance "the" great American drama, for which we have waited so long, and on the whole so cheerfully.

"The Writing on the Wall" — not to beat around the bush, and not to mince matters under a mistaken idea of kindness — could be judged more justly as a play if it could be viewed with some other actress in the stellar part. Ten years ago, when some of us were in college and Miss Nethersole was acting Paula Tanqueray, this English woman surely exerted a kind of charm, surely exhibited flashes of power and roused in the beholder emotions of pity and passion. But the time has now passed when Miss Nethersole seems capable of exhibiting anything but the monot-

onous parade of affectations, posturings and falsities. She is "emotional" when the action calls for no emotion; she is dully "restrained" when the situation calls for passion. She has not a single natural, unconscious moment from the rise of the curtain to the going down thereof. To judge a play definitely when she is the leading player is quite unfair to the author.

Yet, even under the existing conditions, some facts about Mr. Hurlbut's second piece to reach the stage emerge pretty clearly. And the first of these is that he still lacks what so many of our young — and old — native playwrights lack, the power to strike a given note, to create a given interest or mood, and then to sustain that note or mood to the end, not turning aside to follow other threads, not shifting the interest here, there, and everywhere. Some people have scoffed at the idea of teaching playwriting at Harvard or any other college. But this much, at least, an academic training in technique, a so-called "pedantic" course of instruction, can do; it can teach a man to stick to his idea; it can give him a sense of form, a logical consistency of mood and interest. A playwright can be taught to follow his idea, as the football player is taught to follow the ball. And unless the playwright does follow his idea, no matter

how much in earnest he may be he will fail utterly to persuade his audience of his sincerity.

That was Mr. Hurlbut's fate last evening. His play is an attempt to dramatize the Trinity tenements, as it were, even if indirectly. He has felt the present passion for contemporary sociological subjects in the drama, which is entirely to his credit. And he has, no doubt, felt also a certain ethical indignation against existing conditions. But in writing a play about them he has been unable to free himself from conventional sub-plots, from conventional "love interest," from conventional "emotional scenes" for the heroine. These intrusive episodes detract from the main interest — or what should be the main interest — of the drama, and are themselves, in turn, merely weakened and made the more trite by its moments of real seriousness. The result is that you are finally convinced that Mr. Hurlbut, after all, has but an academic interest in tenement-house reform, and a knowledge of it gained chiefly from the magazine articles of Charles Edward Russell. The play is neither theatrically nor ethically effective. It falls between two stools.

It seems more worth while to point this out at length than to rehearse the story of the play, since that story is not designed to become important. Miss Nethersole plays the

part of Barbara Lawrence, wife of a rich man who gains his income from tenement rents. A young reformer interests the wife in slum work and she gradually learns not only how bad the Trinity tenements are, — which causes her to leave Trinity, contrary to all known precedent, — but how bad are the tenements owned by her husband. One in particular, on West Houston Street, has fire escapes that will not bear the legal weight. These she induces her husband to promise to replace. But he merely orders them repainted and a bribe given to the inspector. However, their little boy goes to a Christmas party in this tenement, a fire breaks out, and he is killed in the general disaster. This sudden home-coming of his misdeed is supposed to make a new man of the husband as the curtain descends.

The play is quite needlessly complicated and confused with a secret love affair of the husband, a love affair between the wife and the reformer, and a trite episode concerning a confusion of Christmas gifts which reveals to the wife her husband's amatory double life. If the public demands that a love affair be mixed in with a sociological exposition of the tenement-house problem, the public also demands that this love interest be woven into the story neatly and firmly, not clogging the movement nor delaying the more legitimate

working-out of the real problem of the play — what will be the effect on this man when his business deeds come home to him, what will be the effect on this woman when she finds what her husband has done? Speaking in the first act of the Trinity corporation, the reformer said, “ Their clergy sprinkle rose water, but their deeds smell to heaven,” and the audience applauded gleefully. It was plain where its sympathies lay. It was plain that a sincere, straightaway, hard-handed pounding of immoral tenement owners would have pleased this audience hugely. But they were treated to such pounding only by fits and starts, chiefly only in facts, if not phrases, taken from magazine “ muckraking ” articles. The pounding was n’t first-handed nor whole-hearted. Miss Nethersole must have her chances to “ emote.” The conventional posturings of the playhouse must have their place. Mr. Hurlbut has a long way to go before he can write a sociological play of real value and interest.

## JOHN DREW GOES TO BED

EMPIRE, September 21, 1909

John Drew makes an annual appearance in a new part and in a new play. Most recently

the play was "Inconstant George," an adaptation made with a blue pencil by Gladys Unger, of "L'Ane de Buridan," the light comedy by de Flers and Caillavet that first came to the stage of the Gymnase in Paris. Mr. Drew played George. Doubtless the change in title was needful. Buridan's Ass is perhaps a quadruped better known to the French than to us — at least by that name. Jean Buridan himself, so far as his writings disclose, did not invent this ass. He appears to have been the invention of Jean's controversial enemies, who thrust him on the philosopher for purposes of ridicule. Jean Buridan flourished in the fourteenth century, and taught that the will is not a separate attribute of consciousness, like sensation or emotion, but simply the result of mental reënforcement or increased attention. Thus he anticipated modern psychology; and thus he offended the theologians of his day, who invented the tale of the ass between a bale of hay and a pail of water, equally thirsty and hungry, so that neither impulse was more reënforced than the other and the unfortunate animal perished. Inconstant George is the human counterpart of this quadruped, and the hay and water were impersonated at the Empire by Miss Adelaide Prince and Miss Jane Laurel. But George does not perish. He gets married; a young girl comes along the road and leads



him out of his perplexity. She makes up his mind for him, as it were. Mr. Shaw would say there is nothing strange about that.

De Flers and Caillavet have the trick of being constantly and consistently amusing, — so amusing that even the blue pencil and the cleansing carbolic cannot make them dull. It is a trick with them, no doubt. They write in that strain of solemn nonsense of which Gilbert's "Engaged" is the great example, and make up for something less than his whimsy by something more than his spice. "L'Ane de Buridan" is very, very spicy indeed. The Parisian partners work the familiar wires of farce and make it seem strange, fantastic, almost real at moments — almost real, because in all their pieces is one character, usually a young girl, conceived with as much tenderness as humor, who shares largely in the fortunes of the play. In "Love Watches," to be sure, it was a man, — the poor, unloved bookworm. In "Inconstant George" it is little Micheline, a wild, tom-boyish, naïve girl who loves George, and gets him, too, in the end. Could these authors conceive a character, a whole play, that should be all tenderness, that should be all real? Perhaps not, though they came near to it in their early "Miquette." At least they can go far enough to give their fantastic farces a touch of distinction, an odd little flavor al-



most of tears, faintly discerned but unforgettable and unique.

The plot of "Inconstant George" bears the French mark. George is a man who loves women, the more the better. He can never love one, because he can never make up his mind which one. He is gay, Gilbertian, irresponsible, delightful. Lucien de Versannes is his friend. Lucien has a wife, a mistress, and an orphan ward, Micheline — a wild, sensitive, primitive child — who loves George. Lucien wishes to get George for her, and when he discovers that George has been making love both to his wife and his mistress, he goes to that gay young man, whom he finds in bed, — John Drew wears blue silk pajamas, — and tells him that he must choose. He must decide to take one or the other woman and marry her. Obviously, such a scene, to be tolerable, must be treated with an underlying sense of its preposterousness. It must be solemnly nonsensical. De Flers and Caillavet have so treated it in the original play, and even in the English adaptation, which for some reason too deep for the ordinary mind to fathom has converted Lucien's mistress into his "cousin," it is deliciously funny, gravely preposterous, harmlessly piquant. Why "cousin"? Lucien offers to surrender his wife, to which managerial wisdom could see

no possible objection. But, in our good American code of morality, he must not surrender his mistress!! And does "cousin" deceive anybody? It is a Saxon fig-leaf on a Gallic plot.

Inevitably, George is unable to decide, and Micheline gets him, but not before she has tried to win him by pretending that she is a bad girl, because she has heard him say that he can never love a woman he respects. Micheline's efforts to pretend that she is bad are half comic, half pathetic. In the French version she showed George a photograph of her "lover," which, of course, she had bought in a shop. It was a portrait of Paul Bourget, and Paris was vastly amused at the sally. In the adaptation one waited eagerly to see what name would be selected. And the adapter had a stroke of genius. "Who is that man?" roared Mr. Drew when George had guessed her deception. "It is Wilbur Wright," said Micheline, and the house laughed for minutes.

The too industrious blue pencil has erased lines as well as episodes — lines of a delightful and wicked wit; but on the whole, barring the needless and silly "cousin," the adaptation is as close to the original as could be expected, and, with Mr. Drew as George, it makes intelligent and mirthful entertainment. Mr. Drew's easy command of the resources of a

light comedian made his impersonation of the irresponsible, fantastic, weak-willed, happy-go-lucky youth flow smoothly; his own personality gave the touch of underlying gentleness and worth to George, which the play and the part of Micheline demand; while his powers of comic suggestion made the perplexities of the plot doubly delicious. In a company generally pitifully incompetent to waft these Gallic fantasies of wit, these ever-changing sparkles, across the footlights, Mr. Drew understood his tools, knew his trade, grasped his character, and caught the true and only possible vein of the piece. Lines that in the reading of the play bring laughter fell dead on the audience when the supporting players recited them as so many speeches learned by rote. Then Mr. Drew would enter, touch easily a sentence or two, and once more the Gallic sparkle was there. Miss Mary Boland played Micheline in a manner that brought her much applause and the ready laugh. But she never for an instant reached the real Micheline, never for an instant by her own efforts or her own powers of suggestion found that little salt flavor of tears which gives the play its unique and penetrating charm. Mr. Drew, as he has so often done before in adaptations from the French, carried the performance on his own shoulders, and by his own efforts let us

see what a delightful play is "L'Ane de Buridan."

## MR. THOMAS'S NEW BIRTH

GARRICK, October 18, 1909

There came a time in Tolstoi's life when, in a remarkable book which everybody read with interest and with which nobody agreed, the author repudiated all his former work, declaring either that it was bad art or not art at all. At some such position Augustus Thomas seems to have arrived. When "The Witching Hour" was first acted in 1907 it was apparent at once that Mr. Thomas was a changed man. This play of hypnotism and telepathy, of the sub-conscious forces of the mind, was as different from the farces and melodramas which had preceded it from Mr. Thomas's pen as the Kipling of "Actions and Reactions" differs from the Kipling of "Soldiers Three." Mr. Thomas's sudden preoccupation with subtle things, with immaterial forces, seemed to breed in him a new gift of imagination and a new capacity for style — for that conciseness and distinction of dialogue, that clearness of thought, that dignity of characterization, which our native drama so frequently lacks.

“The Harvest Moon,” his first new play since “The Witching Hour,” also discloses no trace of the old Thomas, save as it tells a story clearly and well. It is entirely the new Thomas working here, the Thomas occupied with the immaterial forces of the mind, with the power of suggestion, with the dynamic importance of thought. Like “The Witching Hour,” it is a play quite evidently freighted with its author’s message to his hearers, and in it Mr. Thomas, though he speaks through the mouth of his leading personage, a French playwright and novelist, may be heard remarking: “I would willingly give the rest of my life to go back and take from my plays every word that has made men less happy, less hopeful, less kind.”

Does Mr. Thomas mean us to consider these words as his personal confession? There can be little doubt of it. “The Witching Hour” roused a suspicion; “The Harvest Moon” confirms it. Its imaginative force and its profound sincerity preclude any possibility that it was written because the earlier play succeeded. It was written because Augustus Thomas has become a missionary. He seems, indeed, to have dedicated his ripened powers as a dramatist—and he is at present the most considerable figure among American playwrights—to preaching the gospel of the dynamic

power of thought. So long as this preaching continues to ripen his imagination and refine his style, and so long as he keeps such a fast hold on his human story as he has done in "The Witching Hour" and "The Harvest Moon," not even the weariest business man or the most rabid opponent of polemics on the stage need worry in the least. The new Thomas is still a dramatist and a better one than before. He has enlarged his own scope and added a new and rare pleasure to our theatre. With the audacity of strong convictions and the skill of long practice, he has created an American drama of ideas, and into the artificial atmosphere of the theatre brought the tonic of a real psychology and the magic of mysterious things.

The plot of "Harvest Moon" is of the simplest contriving. The scene opens in the house at Lenox of Professor Fullerton of Harvard. Mr. Thomas hastens to explain that the professor has other resources than his salary. Fullerton has a daughter, Dora, and a sister, Cornelia. Dora is a girl of eighteen. She wishes to go on the stage. Her mother, it seems, left Fullerton before she was born for the theatre, divorced him, and soon after died in Paris. This fact Dora's Aunt Cornelia has never forgotten, nor let Dora forget. Dora looks like her mother, and that

fact has been held before her as a "warning" all the poor child's life. Such females exist, unfortunately, and they are not always aunts; sometimes they are parents. Naturally the family oppose Dora's choice of profession, and also her affection for a young playwright in whose piece she is to appear. Perhaps Mr. Thomas underestimates the honor in which young playwrights are held in Cambridge, but he is probably quite right about the acting. "In winter," says the family, impressively, "we are in Cambridge, which is practically Boston." Mr. Thomas has not reformed his irony.

It so befalls that Dora's choice depends on the advice of a certain Monsieur Vavin, — a French author with the red ribbon, gray-haired and distinguished, who is somewhat mysteriously upon the scene and evidently well acquainted with the family. In a conference between him, the professor, and the professor's friend, a shrewd and humorous judge, Fullerton confesses that Dora is not his daughter. She was born to his wife in France after the divorce and adopted by him because no father appeared to take charge of her. Vavin does not seem surprised, nor does he counsel the girl to remain at home. Instead, he leads her forth to the theatre as the first curtain falls.



The second act passes in New York, between the dress rehearsal and the first performance of the new play. Dora has refused to act that night because Winthrop, her lover and the author of the play, at the rehearsal forgot the lover in the artist, and told her that her love scene with the leading man was "vulgar." But that is not the whole truth. Vavin gets the whole truth from her by degrees. She is sure that Winthrop is right, but yet their way of playing the scene did not seem vulgar to her. She admits a momentary interest in the leading man. Therefore she is, after all, a vagrant and unworthy woman, as they say her mother was. She is unworthy of her lover. Vavin calls the others into the room. He tells the judge he looks sick. In two minutes he has the judge worried and in three minutes he has the rest deciding that the judge does look ill. Then Vavin turns on them. If he has made a well man think he is sick in a few minutes, he declares, what do they suppose their eighteen years of suggestion might do to the mind of a sensitive girl? This scene is admirably and persuasively handled, and the vividness and justness of its psychological import reach the most obtuse beholder. Again Vavin leads Dora bravely back to the theatre.

The third act, which comprises the one-act sketch from which the whole play arose, is

laid in Vavin's apartments, and here Mr. Thomas may seem to many fantastic. Vavin discourses to Winthrop on the suggestive effect of different colors, and illustrates with lights and draperies how a domestic scene should be played in red; or a scene slightly piquant in yellow; or a true-love scene in moonlight. Here enters the significance of the title. The harvest moon, says Vavin, rises three nights at the same hour, that the "droll God" may help his children to mate in the glad season of the vintage. And the Frenchman sets Winthrop and Dora to rehearsing the true-love scene from the play in the moonlight which streams through the window. Then he slips from the room. The rehearsal changes into reality. The lovers are reconciled. He comes back to find them so, smiles, and sends them home. Standing in the window, silhouetted in the light that streams in upon a darkened stage, he holds a glass of wine up till it flashes like a prism, and says to his servant, as the curtain falls, "It is a droll God, Henri, with His vintage and His children and His harvest moon."

The last act traverses the agonized discovery by Dora that Fullerton is not her father, and the further discovery that Vavin is. As the professor had perhaps driven his wife away, much as he loved her, by his own and his sis-

ter's suggestions that her temperament was a wicked one, so Vavin, who had married her in England, had driven her from him by a suggestion, thoughtlessly made in a quarrel, that their marriage was not legal in France. His penitence and the rush of Dora to his arms make a tender and touching climax to the play, the more as Dora is drawn with more minuteness, care and truth to the intricate mysteries of the feminine heart than Mr. Thomas has before displayed.

All this is obviously a quiet story, without great theatrical excitement. Its constructive weakness is the rather irrelevant third act, which does not further the narrative sufficiently, and is of dubious scientific import. The play lacks alike the cumulative suspense and the obvious excitement of "The Witching Hour," and is destined to much less popularity. The story, however, is in its main outlines admirably told and psychologically sound and valuable. The style is nervous, terse, at times poetic; the play is infused with sincerity, ripe reflection, an earnest purpose. It richly deserves and amply repays attention. It is a just and striking dramatic illustration of the power of suggestion, alike for evil and for good.

The acting of this play was made notable by the performance of George Nash as

Vavin, the French author, the mouthpiece of Mr. Thomas's wisdom. Mr. Nash was some years ago a capable Mercutio. In "The Witching Hour" he was the hardhanded district attorney, the "heavy villain." In "The Harvest Moon" he is bidden to portray a father's solicitude, a noted man's dignity and intellectual weight, and on occasion something of a prophet's authority, a touch of poetry, a Gallic grace and urbanity, and spiritual sweetness. It was a large task and Mr. Nash met it largely. He brought to it unexpected resources of technique, and he projected a personality for his part as tonic, as gracious and as suggestive as the message of the play. It was a performance that would have done credit to any actor on our stage.

## "ISRAEL" AND THE HAPPY ENDING

CRITERION, October 25, 1909

Henry Bernstein's "Israel," originally acted in Paris with Mmme. Réjane, Mr. Gauthier, and Mr. Signoret in the leading parts, was shown at the Criterion Theatre here, in a silly, feeble, and illogical adaptation with a cast grievously misfitted to the characters it undertook. "The Thief,"

Bernstein's first important play to be represented in America, had the benefit of Sydney Herbert and Kyrle Bellew in the cast. His second play to be performed here, "Samson," was feebly adapted by William Gillette, and still more feebly acted by him and by his company. In the present version of "Israel" the limit of manipulation and adulteration seems to be reached. Bernstein's play is a tragedy of modern life. For the poor, ignorant, weak-minded American public, as managerial observation seems to believe it, managerial wisdom decreed a "happy ending" to "Israel." Hamlet lives and marries Ophelia; Othello forgives Desdemona and takes her to his "sooty bosom"; Romeo and Juliet wake up and live happy ever after. And this "happy ending" to "Israel" not only destroys the climax of the play, but to bring it about the keen dramatic contrasts, the intellectual body and balanced construction of Bernstein's final act are thrown to the winds, and something emerges as far from his original drama as Laura Jean Libby is from Thomas Hardy.

Yet Bernstein himself made this American version, at Charles Frohman's request. He no doubt made it because he cared more for American dollars than for the artistic integrity of his work. His act is beneath contempt. Most of his plays have shown an underlying

strain of ineradicable vulgarity. But in his tragedy of his own race one might have expected him at least to be sincere. Sincerity, however, is not in him, any more than fine breeding. He is becoming rapidly an offense.

To add to the slaughter of the American production, Miss Constance Collier, whose Jewish blood speaks in her physical aspect, is cast for Mme. Réjane's part, the Christian mother, and through the long second act she hurtles all over the stage, gurgles and contorts herself, and does, no doubt, her poor best in the fashion of the old "emotional acting" to give the impression that she is creating a character and making clear an emotional story. The part of the elderly Jew falls to Edwin Arden, an actor of experience, but of hard, metallic style, devoid of sentiment or pathos; and the whole character calls for both, and even tragedy. The son, the anti-Semitic agitator and fiery young leader, is played by an English actor, Graham Browne, who has the semblance not of a leader but of a musical comedy dandy, who speaks not as the orator but as one afflicted with a mouth full of hot potato, and whose capacity for tragic emotion and tortured grief is that of an amateur in distress.

The play begins in a Paris club, and for a whole act no women appear on the stage.



Thibault, prince of Clar, a member of the club, is the fiery leader of the anti-Semitic party, and it is his desire to pick a quarrel with Justin Gutlieb, a Jewish banker twice his age, and force him to resign from the club. Most of the members are on Thibault's side, though one or two of them defend the Jews. The act ends when Thibault knocks Gutlieb's hat from his head. The second act takes place in the apartments of Thibault's mother, the only woman in the original play. She sends for Gutlieb, to prevent the duel. It develops that Gutlieb is Thibault's father, that the young man who feels such repugnance at the mere sight of a Hebrew is half Jew himself. There is a fine scene between the mother and Gutlieb, one rarely illuminative both of the paternal instincts of the Jewish race and of the selfish instincts, too. Bernstein knows his own people. Gutlieb refuses to forgo the inevitable duel even with his own son. "It is to my interest to be brave," he says. "I will not go out of the club by the back door." Yet his tenderness for his boy somehow emerges, and there is sense of the passion that once flamed for the mother, the passion which hates the Church which robbed him of her. Thibault discovers him with his mother, and there follows one of Bernstein's long, mounting, wrenching scenes between mother and son. They are alone on the



stage. The mother fights for a promise that Thibault will only wound his opponent, and wins the pledge. But the son's suspicions have been aroused. He drives his mother slowly back in a tortured inquisition till finally, in a tremendous climax of theatrical but poignant emotion, she tells him who he is. The door shuts on the son's cry of dazed anguish.

So far, save for the introduction early in the second act of a young woman bearing the portentous name of Henriette Giscourt de Jouvins, the American adaptation follows the original French play fairly closely. But with the last act the split is as wide as the Atlantic Ocean. As it came first from Bernstein's hand, it is his finest achievement thus far in all his plays. There has, of course, been no duel. Thibault has a scene with his Confessor, who persuades him out of suicide and into the resolution to enter a monastery. No sooner has this Christian influence been pictured working upon him, than there follows a scene between him and Gutlieb, his blood father, which balances the other scene as the Jewish blood balances the French in Thibault's veins. It is a remarkable interview, the father sadly affirming his love for the son, the son stoutly affirming his hatred for the father. But Gutlieb shows him that his very passion against the Jews springs from his Jewish blood, that his power of oratory, his

ambition for leadership, his mind and spirit, are Jewish inheritances, and totally unfit him for the monastic life. Wounded in his dearest pride, torn with the sudden tragedy of discovering that he himself belongs to the race he so much despises and loathes, and belongs to it so irrevocably that he cannot even find refuge in the Church, poor Thibault turns away. The sound of a shot comes from an inner room. The mother, who, years before, when Thibault was born, had abandoned Gutlieb's love at the bidding of the Church, accuses him of her son's death. "It is not I who have killed your son," he returns. "It is your God who has killed him." Her answer is at once a solemn and pathetic cry. "No, no. Not God. God aids us to live. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost." So the play ends.

In the American mutilation, the opening scene with the Confessor is completely omitted, spoiling the carefully planned balance of the act. The spectator learns that a duel has been fought — against all the instincts of Thibault, of course — and finds Thibault querulously complaining to Gutlieb that if he lives he will not know whether his name is Gutlieb or the Prince of Clar. He is about to kill himself (Gutlieb having departed) when Henriette Giscourt de Jouvins, in a picture hat and a

yellow suit, comes in and tells him that she loves him, has always loved him, in fact, since they were children together, and so on in the ancient vein of sentimental gabble. Enter a monastery! Not much! Kill himself — that was something to make a young girl forget even her sex. Henriette forgets all the training of a well-bred young French woman, too, throws her arms around Thibault's neck, and all ends happily. Whether Thibault's name thereafter is Gutlieb or the Prince of Clar you do not know, to be sure. But why bother over a little detail like that in a "happy ending"?

No acting could make the farrago of nonsense into which the last act has been converted either logical, plausible or effective. But the first, and more especially the second, act remain vehicles for the exercise of emotional acting in the traditional sense of the words. The second, in particular, rises in steady crescendo to a pitch of tremendous tension and suspense. But for the portrayal of it both Miss Collier and Mr. Browne were ridiculously inadequate. Mr. Browne not only lacked every attribute of dignity and force required to win conviction for his leadership and sympathy for his pride, but in moments of excitement his words became lost in a rushing whirlpool of disjointed syllables and he simply spluttered. Miss Col-

lier made no effort whatever to appear other than herself in physical aspect, and she does not yet appear old enough to be the mother of a boy of twenty-five or thirty. She expresses tortured mental agonies by extending her neck, by writhing on a sofa, by gestures which can only be described as flopping. She had no unified conception of the character, nor any unified design in the scene. It was impossible to tell whether she still treasured a love for Gutlieb. It was almost equally impossible to tell whether, in fighting against a confession to her son, she was trying to shield him, or herself, or Gutlieb. At times she played the scene like a trivial, weak-minded, lying woman driven to bay. At times she seemed striving for some dim conception of maternal protection of her offspring. And a unified conception of this scene Bernstein has left entirely to the actress. He evidently had none himself. A friendly audience applauded her to the echo. A thoughtful observer could only sit sadly by and wonder that such things be. The best acting in the cast was done by Frederick Eric, in a small part in the opening act. (The character comes into subsequent acts in the original.) He bore himself like a gentleman and a member of an aristocratic society; he spoke clearly and intelligently, he was as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land. We have not

yet seen Bernstein's "Israel" in America. We have only seen a beautiful example of Bernstein's cupidity.

## "HEROD" AT LAST

LYRIC, October 26, 1909

It is now more than a decade since Stephen Phillips flamed into popularity with "Marpessa," and then with the stage tragedy of "Paolo and Francesca," and was hailed as a torch-bearer in the royal line. Alas! his torch burned but briefly with its promised brilliance. It has been growing fainter and fainter every year, till with "Faust" it seemed to go out altogether. Before it dimmed he wrote one tragedy of sustained power and high poetic dignity and pathos, "Herod," his best contribution to the poetic drama. It was first acted in October of 1900, in London, by Sir Herbert Tree. But it was not until October, 1909, at the Lyric Theatre, that it reached the New York stage. Mr. Faversham, who purchased the American rights to the play when it was written, waited nine years before he availed himself of them. And thereby he showed his wisdom. The William Faversham of 1900 could not have played "Herod," even

had his manager permitted him to try the part. To-day Mr. Faversham is his own manager. He has had the courage and the ambition to break away from the routine of commercial stardom — the “safe and sane” policy of long seasons in one part, calculated to please the masses and offend nobody — and last season he mounted a serious Spanish drama, and pocketed the profits. With these profits he has now undertaken “Herod,” and with his new ambition and his new weight of independent responsibility to give him spur, essayed the chief part in the tragedy. For the courage of the venture, the sustained interest of the performance, its unfailing dignity and tragic atmosphere, its beauty of detail and its considerable realization of the emotional poignancy of the story, too much praise can hardly be accorded Mr. Faversham. Unaided, he has raised himself into a new position of authority on the American stage, and unaided he has contributed a significant and an unusual pleasure to the season. He has conquered a New York audience with a poetic tragedy.

For Mr. Faversham did conquer. Let the graybeards talk as they will of the lost art of elocution — and they are quite right; let the youngsters talk as they will about the stilted effect of blank verse on the stage to the ears of a modern audience; yet Stephen Phillips’s



"Herod," though it was read less beautifully than it would have been a quarter of a century ago, though it was acted less largely, far less largely and less poignantly, and though it is written in blank verse, won a breathless interest and inspired the deep and cleansing emotions of true tragedy — of tragedy that is lifted above the sordid and the realistic by the music of its speech and the nobility of its setting. There was appropriate instrumental music by Coleridge Taylor, never obtrusive — muted strings now and again, the fanfare of trumpets without the gates, a stately funeral march. But when this music ceased, it was striking to the modern mind to feel how the music of the verse carried on the mood, how the flashes of poetic imagery with which Mr. Phillips has adorned his drama as with jewels kindled the imagination and, like an exquisite phrase in an opera, intensified the scene. That these things were so, that not for a moment did the interest of the audience flag or its sympathy with the story cease, is at once testimony to the power of Mr. Phillips's play, proving it his most communicating drama for the stage, and testimony as well to the skill of Mr. Faversham's stage management, which was minute and intelligent, and to his acting and that of his company. Great acting it may not have been — granted. But bad acting it was not.



People are not stirred by bad acting, not even in New York.

The text of "Herod" is familiar. The one setting of the tragedy is the great hall of audience in Herod's palace overlooking Jerusalem, a setting that inevitably suggests the operatic "Salome." But the Herod of Phillips's drama is another and less degenerate an upstart, who has won his way to sovereignty by sheer ability and relentless and cruel force, and married Mariamne of the Maccabean line. He loves her with the fury of the tiger, yet with a kind of regal and splendid abandon, a magnificence of passion. Her younger brother, Aristobulus, is the idol of the people. Herod fears for his throne, and much against his will, since he knows Mariamne's love for her brother, he makes way with the youth. Mariamne's discovery of this treachery, her revulsion from Herod, whom she has loved truly and passionately, his frenzied efforts to win her favor again, the relentless pressure of circumstance which brings about her death, also, and the king's final madness over her corpse, form the web of the tragedy. The final act consists of the efforts of all the court to keep from the tottering brain of Herod knowledge of what he has done to his queen. It ends with the final revelation. The demands upon the actor to express incipient madness, tortured grief and

ultimate mental and physical collapse, to pass from outbursts of regal eloquence over the greatness of Judea to the feverish poetic imaginings of his own passions, are tremendous. It is said that Mr. Phillips originally wished Mr. Mansfield to play the part. Only Mr. Mansfield, in this country, could have fully realized it.

Mr. Faversham did not fully realize it. He missed it often by a long way. His voice, naturally husky, lacks the necessary range and variety, for one thing. He himself lacks the physical force and the spiritual bigness. His technique is deficient to give the transitions of emotion that vivid sharpness which Mr. Mansfield knew so well how to impart and which the Italian Novelli makes indescribably thrilling. Mr. Faversham lacks, too, imagination, the ability to pause at the proper moment and with some gesture or pantomime or other physical act heighten the significance of the scene. He wants variety as well. Yet, granted all these things, the new William Faversham disclosed as Herod a passionate sincerity, a clear and not unmusical reading of the verse, a well-planned and consistently maintained conception of his part, and a dignified breadth of execution, which carried the salient outlines of Herod across the footlights, if it did not quite fill them out, and which was not without its moments of

keen emotional effect. There was a touch of splendor, for example, as he spoke the lines:

“I dreamed last night of a dome of beaten gold,  
To be a counter glory to the sun.  
There shall the eagle blindly dash himself,  
There the first beam shall strike, and there the  
moon  
Shall aim all night her argent archery.”

And there was tragic grief and plastic beauty in his final cry over Mariamne's body and his dumb standing beside it, seeing yet sightless, while the awed throngs murmured, “Hail Herod, Herod, King of the Jews.” Such a Faversham is a new Faversham surely.

More remarkable was the transformation of Miss Julie Opp, who acted Mariamne. She has caught her husband's fire of ambition and she has been born in it anew. Once an actress of affected pose and apparent insincerity, she played Mariamne with a sincerity so vivid that it stabbed. All her posturing and pose had dropped away; and not only did she plan and consistently hold to a definite conception of her part, but this conception was fine and true, dignified, womanly, large, and tragic. Moreover, she has somehow gained the technical means to make such a conception manifest. Her grief she expressed largely and simply;

and her revulsion from Herod was the more poignant because she was able to indicate clearly in the midst of it how deep the love had been which he had killed. To do that is to act. Perhaps what more of our players need is the incentive and the opportunity. The lesser parts were filled much as we have come to expect them to be filled in attempts at the poetic drama. But, in the midst of the opulent setting which Mr. Faversham has given the play, the actors had been trained to move with precision and significance. There was little that was meaningless in the running about of the mobs, the occasional inburst of pageantry and pomp, and nothing which was not dignified and in keeping with the high mood of the tragedy. Indeed, the effect of suspense, of impending doom, of large passions and calamities, was consistently sustained by the stage management; and Mr. Faversham was his own stage manager. Whatever the fate of "Herod" with the public, it marks a new step forward in Mr. Faversham's career.

## A TEMPEST IN A TEAPOT

LYCEUM, December 13, 1909

Mr. Somerset Maugham is not one of those British humorists who pun. He left that for

the weather to do when Miss Marie Tempest reappeared in New York in his "Penelope." Seldom has a fiercer rain-storm swept around the Times Building and through Longacre Square; but the audience that welcomed Miss Tempest filled every seat in the Lyceum Theatre, and there was no chill in its welcome for her. Mr. Maugham's play and Miss Tempest's acting work well together for good to them that love amusement, and most of us do. By this time we in America have taken Mr. Maugham's measure. As somebody has said, he does the bad old things in a good new way. He has absolutely nothing to say, and he says it very agreeably. There are no real people, no real emotions, no real thoughts, no real situations, in his plays. There is not even any real conversation in them. All the characters talk alike, most of the time in rather bookish epigrams, which are bright enough to pass for smart speech with the average theatre audience. It is all absolutely artificial, absolutely machine made, and Mr. Maugham himself, as he has taken the trouble to inform the world in various interviews, does not take it seriously. Naturally, then, nobody else does. It has, however, a specious kind of drawing-room glitter. Mr. Maugham's personages are very well dressed and obviously belong to our "better classes," while they speak and act with

a sort of diluted Shavian sparkle that now and then makes them seem like figures of comedy.

As a matter of fact, Mr. Maugham writes farce and nothing more. Some of us like farce to be more frank; we enjoy better the laughter that holds its sides and puts on no airs. But you cannot please everybody, and Mr. Maugham contrives to please a great majority, with the least offense to the minority — the dreamers of dreams and the poor, humorless lovers of reality, who think that the stage has some connection with life. Of a piece with Mr. Maugham's plays, Miss Tempest's acting is clever, humorous, pleasing, and absolutely artificial. It has abundant theatrical effectiveness and absolutely no dramatic illusion. Miss Tempest makes her "points" unerringly but she never suggests a passion. She is never a person but a clever performer. Again, like Mr. Maugham, she never takes what she is doing seriously. He utters interviews, and she winks at the audience. On the whole, her winks are more forgivable than his interviews, because they are so much better natured.

The theme of "Penelope" is the winning back of a husband by his wife, who adopts the policy of throwing him much with the other woman, of abandoning her former loving ways, of making herself desirable again by becoming



inaccessible — an old thing in a new dress quite according to Mr. Maugham's formula. The wife, whose name is Penelope, is married to a doctor. It is the doctor's excuse when he leaves her daily to see the other woman, that he is going to the bedside of a mythical Mrs. Mack, who is very ill. About once a week Mrs. Mack has to have an operation, an all-day job, which oddly falls on race-days. There is, for instance, the Derby operation, and the Sandown. Finally Mrs. Mack gets a little better and is about to be moved to Paris, with the doctor's aid, when Penelope, who has seen through the myth all the while, plays her last card and succeeds in winning back her husband. The other woman, unaware that Penelope even suspects, is beguiled from one fabrication about Mrs. Mack to another by the triumphant and remorseless Penelope who, in a comical scene, finally tells her that Mrs. Mack is dead. The other woman, supposing a symbol in this, weeps. Penelope, hiding her mirth, weeps also — crocodile tears, which the other woman fancies are shed seriously for her husband's patient. Here there is double meaning and suggestive by-play: a capital scene, and one capitally fitted to Miss Tempest. All ends, of course, as it should — in a play.

Miss Tempest, indeed, is from curtain to curtain the same bubbling, vital, arch, piquant,



and faintly acid comedian of old. She has the old manner of playing frankly to the audience, winking at them, delivering to them her "asides," cultivating the ways and not a few of the tricks of Réjane herself. She has the old, infectious, explosive laugh, like a cough gone wrong, that never fails to amuse the audience, that she uses too often and that she cannot forgo at moments when the personage she is acting, though not Miss Tempest, would be doing anything but laughing. She has the same expressive face, so devoid of any suggestion of the serious or the tragic, so nervously alive to irony and fun. She has the same small, trim, active body, vital and exuberant. Better still, she has the same sharp, clear-cut enunciation, which can deliver staccato speeches with great rapidity and no loss of clearness, and the technical skill to give point to each speech, to get its full significance to the audience, no matter how fast it is delivered. Personality aside, Miss Tempest has a technical equipment for comedy that it is a pleasure to watch in action. She lacks the power to suggest sincerity. She cannot create the illusion of real characters. But neither can Mr. Maugham. So, working together, they evolve an evening's entertainment that is interesting for its dexterity and for its farcical sprightliness. But what a company Miss Tempest has brought with her

from England! Almost any American company which has gone to that capital would shine beside it.

## MR. KLEIN TACKLES THE COURTS

HUDSON, December 27, 1909

There come times when the critic who has urged the dramatists to forsake the pasteboard realms of storybook tradition for the actual world feels grave doubts concerning his own wisdom. If the critic could only be as sure of himself as Charles Klein, for example, is! Mr. Klein is ready to tackle any problem of the actual world and solve it in three or at the most four acts — the Standard Oil Company and similar trusts, capital and labor, the police system, and now, in his most recent play, "The Next of Kin," shown in New York at the Hudson Theatre, the general injustice of the law and the abuse of medical jurisprudence. These are a few of the simple little questions to which Mr. Klein has addressed his intellect, that Mr. Jones's "great realities of modern life" may not be missed from the American drama. Looking over the list of Mr. Klein's plays, and especially watching his latest drama unfold, one cannot help speculating just how

passionately Mr. Klein wishes to regulate the trusts, adjust the differences between capital and labor, correct police abuses and expedite legal justice, or how far his interest in these problems is that of the playmaker seizing on "timely" themes.

One cannot help speculating further just how much Mr. Klein knows about these grave and intricate matters. To know enough about one of them to produce a work of art concerning it, of real significance, would satisfy the ordinary mind. To know enough about all of them to treat all significantly implies the possession of genius, and we are not quite ready yet to declare Mr. Klein a genius. There is something spurious about his plays of contemporary social and economic problems. It is hard to take them quite seriously, even the best of them, like "The Lion and the Mouse," or even to say with confidence that they mean well, because it is impossible to detect behind them any of the reformer's passion. After all, the drama of contemporary problems is only valuable above other drama when it is born of wisdom and written with sincerity. It must be just, true, yet passionately in earnest. All of these things "The Next of Kin" is not. Seldom has a duller, more preposterous, ill-informed, ill-digested, inconclusive and apparently mechanical piece of playmaking reached

the stage under the name of a supposedly leading playwright. It is not alone, nor even chiefly, the clumsy construction and vague, sudden solution of the piece which prevent illusion and effectiveness. Rather the piece betrays the lack of any evidence of a real knowledge and grasp of the subject matter, a genuine first-hand interest in this phase of actual life. The incidents are not probable; they do not appear even possible; and certainly they are not typical. The play holds no illusion from beginning to end.

The story is concerned with the efforts of James Marsh to wrest from his niece the fortune her father has willed to her. James has secured the valuable services of ex-Judge Bascom Cooley, a bold, bad man, whose legal knowledge does not seem to be overpowering so far as he gives proof of it on the stage, but who, you are informed, "has never lost a case," chiefly, it would appear, because his political pull is so strong. The size of the fortune is never named, but it was great enough to induce Cooley to take the case on a fifty per cent basis. It would further appear that the girl was less than twenty-one (though her age is not stated, and Hedwig Reicher, who played the part, looked more), because the bold, bad Cooley gets uncle appointed as her guardian and as the trustee of her fortune. She, however,

defies him and refuses to live with him. Then more extreme measures are required.

Now it was perfectly evident from the girl's talk and appearance that she would very soon be of age, and bad as our laws may be, her attorney (if he had n't been a fool) could have found a way to demand an accounting of her fortune while she was reaching twenty-one. No politician quite owns all our courts yet. Meanwhile, she might have worked. What did happen was this: Cooley sent Dr. Zacharie in a black beard to watch over her, hypnotize her, and make her appear of unsound mind. When this excellent specimen of the medical fraternity had accumulated his "evidence," Cooley had a lunacy commission appointed, and their examination of the girl made the "great scene" of the play. Between the hypnotic glances of Dr. Zacharie and the questionings of the rest of the board, Miss Marsh naturally went to pieces with fright and nerves, and there Miss Reicher had histrionic opportunities that she used fully. The third member of the board was represented as neither a villain nor a fool, but a man of science. Such a man would actually not have been deceived for a moment. If the scene had been conceived as Gilbertian satire it would have been excellent drama. Conceived as serious drama, it became burlesque. In spite of Miss Reicher's moving

performance, which denoted with simple means and few gestures or movements, the growth of terror, of nervous tension, of hysteria rising to the breaking point, you watched this scene with something perilously akin to shame. You were actually uncomfortable before such a travesty of science, even the disputed science of the alienists, and such a gross slander on legal proceedings, even as they are conducted at their wickedest.

Of course the poor girl was committed to a private "rest cure," and things looked rosy for uncle; but uncle's happy-go-lucky stepson, who loved the persecuted maiden, stepped in and stumbled upon a solution. The play ended with the promise that Cooley would be "sent up" for seven years. As he appeared to control every court in New York, it was not quite easy to see how this retribution could be brought about. To take this array of nonsense seriously as a "muck-raking" of our courts and lunacy commissions is quite impossible, and merely as a story set forth on the stage "The Next of Kin" is disconnected and dull. Its redeeming features in performance were the acting of Miss Reicher as the persecuted heroine, notable for its easy and truthful suggestion of tortured nerves and mental suffering, and the acting of Wallace Eddinger as the happy-go-lucky stepson. Mr. Eddinger was very boyish,



despite his hints that he used to dine at Delmonico's when that café was at Twenty-sixth Street, and his breezy good humor and touches of true, unaffected feeling brought a breath of life to the stage. The other players wrestled with impossible parts and were more to be pitied than scorned.

## BOOTH TARKINGTON, SOPHOMORE

GARRICK, January 3, 1910

Booth Tarkington has been out of Princeton close on a score of years now, but he appears to have remained a sophomore in heart and head. Old T. E. Brown, the Manx poet, sang the joys of a land "Where Kate and I are twenty-two forever." Brown, however, sang of it wistfully, looking back in memory. Only Richard Harding Davis and Booth Tarkington, perhaps, those literary Peter Pans, those boy authors who won't grow up, have discovered it and dwell eternally therein. Recently Mr. Tarkington has introduced Harry Leon Wilson into the sophomore circle, and the results of their joint labors have been pouring out upon the stage in Fitchian profusion since the phenomenal public success of "The Man from Home." Already in New York during



the season of 1909-10 we have seen their sugar and water "Springtime," played by Mabel Taliaferro, and their "Cameo Kirby," played by Dustin Farnum. Finally at the Garrick Theatre we saw their latest output, "Your Humble Servant," played by an actor much bigger than the play, Otis Skinner. They have again failed to pass their examination and must remain in the sophomore class another year. It is evident that in preparation for this latest examination they have been reading Dickens; he is not required reading in sophomore English any more.

"Your Humble Servant" takes its name, doubtless, from the old title of the players in England, "His Majesty's Servants." Mr. Skinner plays the part of Lafayette Towers, an actor, and the piece treats of theatrical life and theatrical folk. But they are not the theatrical folk of the Gay White Way nor of popular imagination. They are not the theatrical folk pictured in the Sunday newspapers and the ten cent magazines, seated in their motor cars or in the act of drawing \$1000 as weekly salary. Mr. Lafayette Towers and his "Bandit Bride" company are not playing New York at all. Their tour started in Rahway, N. J., and included such centres of artistic culture as Dover, N. H., and Athol, Mass. In short, Mr. Lafayette Towers and his troupe are American

cousins to Mr. Vincent Crummles and his aggregation of talent, among whom Nicholas Nickleby and the lean and hungry Smike found refuge and adventure. This relationship does not wholly bear out the Indianian Americanism of "The Man from Home," but we will let that pass.

There was a time when theatrical life "in the tall timber" in America was quite as picturesque as anything Dickens could invent for the Crummles. Anyone who has read the delicious Reminiscences of old Sol Smith will recall his story of the performance of "Pizzarro" when eight actors played seventeen parts, and the star, after he was killed in the last act, had to fall off stage so that he could play slow music while the curtain fell. But we have been "Syndicated" since those happy, careless days. Actors still throw coal at the rats in their dressing-rooms out on the one night stands, and Old Timers still storm Shakespeare in the Opera House at Athens, Ga. But life on the road is rather uncomfortable than romantic, rather unsanitary than seductive. Taken as a subject for art, it demands the realistic method, and would emerge as rather unhappy. But to treat any subject realistically is quite beyond the powers of Mr. Tarkington and Mr. Wilson. "Your Humble Servant" is no closer to actual life than — well, than

their other plays. It is an echo of the Crummles episode, a kind of literary ghost new-risen on this side of the Atlantic.

The first act of the new piece takes place behind the scenes in the Weedsport Opera House, during a performance of "The Bandit's Bride." Lafayette Towers in romantic costume makes his entrance from the supposedly real stage, pursued by the applause of the supposedly real audience. Poor Peter Dailey, when he made such an entrance at Weber and Fields, used to look back and remark, "Jolly dogs, those stage hands." Lafayette Towers, who has been barn-storming all his life with Broadway as his distant goal, has a ward, Maggie Druce, a child of stage parents, whom he loves, evidently, more as a lover than a guardian; but she loves Dick Prentice, a stage-struck youth who has fled from his very rich parents on Madison Avenue, New York, and is now a member of "The Bandit's Bride" company. What there is of drama in this act is given over to the vain attempts of Papa Prentice to coax his boy back from the wicked, vulgar life of an actor, and Lafayette Towers's attempts to save some portion of his wardrobe from the sheriff, after the manager, Isidore Blum, has skipped with the receipts, which were \$123.

In the second act Lafayette, still cheerful,

Maggie and Dick are living in a New York boarding-house, looking for work and putting off the landlady. The lad, of course, is sick of the privation, and the childish impracticality and eternal make-believe of Lafayette get on his nerves. The act finally ends with Maggie packing him off home by pretending she has run away herself. The third act shows him in the home of his parents on Madison Avenue, where a very "swell" entertainment is being given and where Lafayette and Maggie come to do a turn, evidently without realizing whose house it is. Here the only real drama is supplied by a scene where Maggie, to put Dick off again, "for his good," declares that she loves not him, but Lafayette. He goes out raving, and Lafayette comes to embrace Maggie, who then has to tell him the truth, which, of course, was perfectly obvious. In the language Lafayette would have used himself, this is "old stuff" — frightfully old stuff. It is hardly worthy of the freshman class.

In the last act we are shown Maggie's dressing-room upon the occasion of her final triumph as a star. Of course it is Lafayette who has trained her; he has been her Belasco, as it were — and equally, of course, she at last realizes that she does love him, after all.

As a dramatic fabric this play is fluff; it is spun-sugar. As a real picture of theatrical

life or a real comment upon the theatrical temperament as opposed to the worldly way of thinking and acting it is equally worthless. Its sole theatrical value is as a setting for the exaggerated, fantastic but exquisitely composed and deliciously colored character of Lafayette Towers, as Otis Skinner acts him. Evidently realizing precisely the limitations of his play, Mr. Skinner chose to compose this character in the key of a Cruikshank drawing, the comic element exaggerated, the poses and gestures pictorial and large, but underneath a solid basis of truth. It is a ticklish part, when the actor is called upon constantly to burlesque his own profession, and Mr. Skinner brings it off triumphantly. There was always the touch of the barn-stormer of the comic cuts and popular tradition in his speech and attitude, but never did he quite let go a suggestion of underlying sincerity and even poetry. For instance, when between them the poor dwellers in the flat raked up \$14 and sent Lafayette out to buy a stove. Mr. Skinner's acting was inimitable in its comic burlesque and its pathetic appeal. He put on his rusty frock-coat and pot hat, he stuck a paper flower in his button-hole, he swung a cane under his arm, drew himself up erect and remarked, "As for Lord Roseberry's policies, I care not for them. If Lady Huntington calls, say that I have gone on a yachting

trip to the Solent. In the meantime, do not be surprised to receive a packet from Third Avenue"; and he strutted out.

Again, when poor Lafayette secured a one-line part, as a butler, he consoled himself with the reflection, grandiloquently expressed, that he would rather paint a miniature perfectly than a great canvas badly. Mr. Skinner made this very comic and slyly satirical, but he made it plain, too, that the old actor, after all, spoke from a genuine artistic conscience; all of which is only to say that Mr. Skinner has the art and the rich technical resources to make his points, as the saying goes, and to keep a character true, consistent and human at the same time. He is an actor, not a mere imitator of life. The mere imitation of life, save in the most insignificant parts, is seldom effective on the stage. Mr. Skinner, too, possesses a rare gift for the plastically picturesque. His own poses and the groupings he arranged were treats to see and had about them the real Cruikshank flavor he was evidently after. But, after all, he is a man much bigger than this play, much more vital both for comedy and romance. Its fluffy, unreal, sophomoric love story, its total lack of a real, sincere, underlying idea either of satire or sociology, its failure to achieve any dramatic sharpness, make it but the most trivial of plays, — simply a frame patched together for Mr.



Skinner's portrait. Mr. Skinner does not, perhaps, belong by nature to Ibsen and the realists, but he belongs to a man's play; he belongs to the romance which strides out vitally and can persuade grown men and women, as well as sophomores, that there is still a road to Arcady.

## MISS BARRYMORE IN "MID-CHANNEL"

EMPIRE, January 31, 1910

A better illustration could hardly be desired than that furnished at the Empire Theatre by Miss Barrymore of the statement frequently made by the present writer and by many other observers of our stage, that what our actors need is a chance. You cannot make a great interpreter of Beethoven out of your pupil by keeping him at the task of playing ragtime, and the public does not demand any such foolishness. But neither can you make a great actress out of a woman, however talented, by keeping her at the task of playing fluff and frivol. Yet that is exactly what the theatrical public, more heterogeneous and easy-going than the musical, would seem too often to demand. To



satisfy "her public," the managers of Miss Ethel Barrymore have for many years kept her at the task of playing fluff and frivol, and on the very rare occasions when she tried something better, such as Galsworthy's "The Silver Box," they have taken her failure to attract patronage evidently as a sign that the heights were not for her. And, indeed, it began to seem as if they were not. Miss Barrymore seemed settling into the rut of mediocrity. But several things strange and wonderful have happened to Miss Barrymore in the past twelve months, and unto her has been born ambition, too. At last she has appeared in Sir Arthur Pinero's latest play, "Mid-Channel" — a dire failure in England, this tense and vital drama — and not only did she give a performance astonishingly well conceived and sharply executed, considering her past training and achievements, but she still further rose to the necessities of a large, ample part and discovered within herself powers of emotional expression poignant and pitiful. There will be hosts of the "Barrymore public," no doubt, who will fret that in "Mid-Channel" they cannot laugh with her. But to some more thoughtful men and women it is a source of rare satisfaction that at last the promise of that lovely voice and expressive face has been fulfilled, and you can weep with her, suffer with her, under-

stand through the spell of her acting a little better the sorrows and perplexities of our frail humanity. In short, Miss Barrymore has become an actress.

It is the fashion in England just now to belittle Pinero. When a critic has nothing else to do he writes about Pinero's "stilted language," reproaches him for his choice of subjects, or otherwise throws mud at the idol of a decade ago. Yet the Pinero of "Mid-Channel" is the same Pinero and his choice of subject which lately brought him failure in England is just what brought him fame twenty years ago. The ancient skill has not departed nor the ancient truth grown dim. "Mid-Channel" is the tragedy of domestic bickering. We fancy there has been no decline in bickering during the past decade; if there has, it is rather odd that Max Beerbohm should be the man to discover it. In this play, naturally, Sir Arthur does not select for his husband and wife a man and woman of great culture, gentle breeding, wide interests. Such are not the people who wreck their lives on the reef of bicker. Nor does he go down into the lowest stratum of society, possibly because he is not familiar with it himself, nor can it be supposed that his audiences will be. He selects for his characters exactly the people of whom his tragedy is most typical.

The husband of "Mid-Channel" is a broker,

a rather coarse-grained man, neither good nor bad, rather dull, rather over-sexed, very much under-educated, whose ideal of happiness is summed up in a day on 'change when the money comes his way, a dinner in a glittering café, a music hall, and women. This is a man who at home can hardly be an inspiring companion and who has not the character to rule his petty passions, curb his temper, win peace by philosophy and will power. He is also a man who does not want children. The wife is better — at the start — than this man. More gently bred, she is "mated to a clown." That she is mated to him is a pretty sure sign that her own strength of character is not great, and she yields to his ways of life, takes up his companions, his vocabulary, lays over her native self the discoloring stain of his vulgarity. She yields to his wish to have no children, and after fourteen years of married life the play discloses them at that point just short of middle age which the inevitable Pinero "family friend" describes as the mid-channel reef — the period when, as they say, their horses have stopped prancing and settled down to a jog, when they take one another as a habit and, childless, bicker over petty things; when they are "on each other's nerves," and yet — and here is the pathetically true feature of it — when they are by no means free of other dan-

gers. Sordid? Yes, perhaps. But how true, how typical this pair is. They are not insular. New York knows them. Perhaps all races know them. Perhaps London knew them too well.

It is this pair that Sir Arthur studies remorselessly for four acts. The first act begins with a reconciliation after a bicker and ends with a fresh bicker, over what hotel they shall go to in Paris. The husband is for a cheap one. The wife says if he were taking one of those painted ladies pictured in the illustrated papers he would go to the Ritz. The scene becomes a vulgar brawl, and the husband leaves the house for good. It is the last straw. In the second act there is little narrative but much subtle and fascinating study of feminine character. The wife, caught on the rebound, has been indiscreet with one of her "tame robins," a young man half a dozen years or more her junior. But to his disgust she talks about her husband. It is evident that she still loves him, in spite of the fact that he has "taken up" with a woman of unsavory reputation. The wife's moods alternate,—irresponsible, baffling. Finally she ends by dismissing the young man, giving as one of her reasons that a nice young girl wants him, and evidently has a real claim on him.

The third act shows the husband disgusted with his mistress. His rebound has brought

him no peace, either. He thinks of his wife, believing her true. He dismisses the mistress. The wife comes back to him and offers him the key to the house once more. He makes a clean breast of his escapade. She forgives. But he is led to question her. The truth comes out. "We are both sinners together," she exclaims. One is reminded of the great situation in "Tess." And if Angel Claire left Tess it is small wonder that this coarse-grained man applied to his wife the double code. He is decent enough to say that he will give her the divorce, but that she must then marry the "tame robin." But the "tame robin" has in his turn been caught on the rebound and has promised to marry the sweet young ingénue. Here, alike for him and for the wife, is one of life's little ironies that would please Thomas Hardy. The husband offers to let the wife decide which woman the "tame robin" shall marry. Perhaps to vindicate herself in her own sight, to prove that she still is decent at heart, she decides by jumping off the balcony to her death. The conclusion is logical enough; but in working out his fourth act Mr. Pinero shows far less freshness and skill than in the other three; he is, in fact, distinctly clumsy, letting the tragic atmosphere that should envelop his catastrophe quite evaporate in a maze of exits and entrances by all the personages concerned.

The play does not rise steadily to a final satisfaction of the senses, like "Iris." But it remains none the less a powerful, absorbing, heart-stirring and profoundly human and significant piece of dramatic writing.

And the surprise of its performance — which was in most particulars excellent, well balanced, and staged with a nice regard for the surface illusions of life — was the acting of Miss Barrymore. Her many admirers, gathered in force, who evidently knew more about her than they cared about Pinero, were disposed to laugh in the first act during the scenes of her bickerings. But never after that did she allow them to suppose for an instant that they were not watching a serious and passionate study of a woman's tragedy. She made it evident that her vulgarity was largely an overlay of habit and association upon a once sweeter woman. As she said, "I am an irresponsible little Puss, with lots of good in me, too." The flux and change of her moods, thanks, no doubt, in part to the acid outlines of Mr. Pinero's writing of the part, were surely denoted, and better than all when the time came in the third act for the revelation to her husband of her own sin, Miss Barrymore rose to the occasion with a simplicity of voice and action, a tortured keenness of facial expression and a depth of love and remorse and suffering in her tones, which



brought a gush of tears even to her traditional public. Nor did she make the subsequent flare of bickering temper against her husband's unforgiveness illogical and abrupt. It was another indication of the pitifully vacillating and weak woman that she was, or had become.

Of course, in such a part, there is much which Miss Barrymore did not, perhaps, grasp. In the last act, especially, she did not indicate the approach of her impending suicide. Often, too, she smiled her old smile, the smile of comedy, when that smile was inappropriate. Her face is not yet quite under control. But her performance was a tremendous advance on anything she has yet done, and was in the main consistent, vivid, truthful, and at moments indescribably touching. Her voice has a new note now, the note of tragedy, of suffering. At any rate, her assumption of this rôle has put her in a position to make the next step upward more easy, it has begun to make for her a wider, a more discriminating public. The husband was played by Charles Dalton, and played very well. He, too, understood the play and the part, and was bitterly truthful to his unpleasant and too common type. H. Reeves Smith was excellent as the family friend, and Eric Maturin, as the "tame robin," acted admirably and enunciated atrociously. The play



was witnessed with close attention by the audience, and the "Barrymore public" took what comfort they could of the fact that their favorite wore beautiful and becoming gowns.

## MISS CROTHERS CHAMPIONS HER SEX

COMEDY, February 8, 1910

"A Man's World," the newest play by Miss Rachel Crothers, author of "The Three of Us," fulfills the promise of that early piece, certainly much more than did her intervening work. It was acted at the Comedy Theatre in New York, by Miss Mary Mannering and an excellent company, and by its uncompromising allegiance to its premises (though the logical conclusion is not the happy ending dear to convention), its searching truth of feminine psychology, its air of quiet but studied realism, its obvious significance as a comment on the feminist movement of the day—a thoughtful, sympathetic, intelligent comment—it took its place as one of the most interesting native dramas brought to New York during the season. If the long arm of coincidence were not stretched so far to make the plot conform to the thesis of the play, "A

Man's World" would be an important piece of stage literature. As matters stand, it is an interesting and at times a moving play, frankly and honestly written from a woman's point of view, but it just misses the masculinity of structure and the inevitableness of episode necessary to make it dramatic literature. It is, however, genuine work; it cannot be overlooked. This time Miss Crothers seems to have come back to stay.

Consider, first, Miss Crothers's daring in the choice of a theme and her greater daring in her solution of the problems that it raises. The theme is that ancient one so dear to dramatists and writers of fiction of all sorts — the double moral code. What the man demands of the woman who is his, she does not demand nor expect from him. Or, at any rate, if she vaguely expects it, she does not get it. The traditional treatment of the theme is to devise a situation in which the erring man is forgiven by the woman, who then in her turn asks forgiveness, only to be refused. That was the situation in "Tess," and that was the situation only a week earlier in Pinero's "Mid-Channel." But it is not the situation in Miss Crothers's play. The woman, it turns out, has done nothing whatever that needs forgiveness. She has a little theory — women do get such theories tenaciously into their heads nowadays — that

she does not care to have to forgive the man she loves for any unsavory episodes connected with "the living of a man's life." However, just such an occasion arises. The episode is particularly unsavory and she loves the man particularly hard. Yet she does not forgive him. She stands out partly from principle, if she is a woman. But chiefly there is that in her nature which will not permit her to forgive. So the bewildered and somewhat vexed man goes off forever as the curtain falls. This is a new twist to the old situation; this is the new woman, indeed; and this, a woman's play, faces the old problem without cant or sentimentality, and lands a good square blow.

The scene of "A Man's World" is laid "in an old New York house near Washington Square," and it is easy to surmise that the former "A Club," which inhabited lower Fifth Avenue, gave the suggestion of this home of men and women living a semi-Puritanical, semi-Bohemian life and earning their livings by writing novels about the East Side, painting miniatures, constructing "the great American drama," and otherwise serving the causes of sweetness and light. The most popular member of the household is Miss Ware, a novelist and worker among the East-Side girls, who has adopted a small boy called Kiddie. She says she took him under her wing in Paris,

when his mother died, abandoned by the unknown father. But if Miss Ware is popular with the men, she does not escape the tongues of the women, and particularly that of a singer who is jealous of her. One of the men in the house — the only man successful from a worldly point of view — is Malcolm Gaskell, a newspaper editor. (Miss Crothers did not intend to be satiric.) The singer notes and broods over a resemblance to him in the face of the child, and puts the obvious construction upon it. Gradually — a little too gradually for dramatic purposes — the situation is forced. Gaskell is the first to suspect the gossip, believes that it does not concern him but only Miss Ware, and gives a great sigh of joy when she swears that the child is not hers. She tells how she took it from the dying mother and how from that day she has hated the father who let it come nameless into the world. But gradually the further revelation comes to both of them that Gaskell is the father. He does not so much ask forgiveness as he seems to demand it, or rather to expect it as a matter of course. But he does not get it. This may be a man's world, as he says, but Miss Ware cannot see it that way. Such is the main drift of the story: a long strain on coincidence, certainly, but carefully calculated to fit the thesis.

To sketch this skeleton, however, is only

faintly to indicate the merit of Miss Crothers's drama. Her men, to be sure, did not always escape the charge of being dummies in trousers, but she filled her house of Bohemians with such truthful and appealing working women and set them in situations so admirably designed to bring out the pathos and social significance of their lot that they alone would make the play worth while. One of them, for instance, was a certain Clara Oaks, played with rare skill and emotional sympathy by Miss Helen Ormsbee. Clara painted miniatures. She had come from the circles where daughters are supported in ease, but she was a poor relation, and, still further, had ideas of her own about supporting herself by "art." She was a weak and rather silly creature, plain of face and hopelessly without talent. The other artists gently "guyed" her through two acts. But in the third act, after she had held an exhibition of her work and nobody had come, she broke down, and there was no thought of "guying" any more. She became as pathetic a figure as the stage has seen in many a day. "I am one of those everlasting women," she wept, "that the world is full of, with nobody to take care of them, and who can't take care of themselves. I never had an offer of marriage. I'd marry anybody who would pay the bills. Any little runt of a man can marry, and

have a home and a family. Oh, oh, I want to be pretty and bad!" This poor little creature was painted so truthfully and played so poignantly by the actress that men and women alike in the audience were blinded by tears during her outbreak.

And so, later, when Miss Ware had explained to the jealous singer that Kiddie was not her child, and made the gossip believe it, the two of them discussed the peril of love and the power of man in words quite in keeping with their traits in the drama but also of penetrating insight and a kind of grim pathos. "You can't stir up any man's life," said the singer. "You're lucky if it looks right on top." And the novelist, the woman of dreams and theories, fought back the suggestion, till memory smote her of that resemblance of Kiddie to the man she loved. In some way unaccountable, that scene, as Miss Crothers has written it, seems far larger than the small room on the stage of the Comedy Theatre. Then and there these two characters speak indeed for themselves, but also for their sex. We may desire a more smooth, orderly and swift development of the narrative than Miss Crothers could compass, and a less strained plot, less warped to meet the requirements of the thesis, less obviously "doctored." We may condemn "A Man's World" pretty severely for these



faults. But the fact remains that the play has something about it of passionate sincerity and feminine insight which redeems many faults and makes it significant, interesting, and at times deeply moving.

The piece was acted and staged in a manner quite in keeping with its mood and style. Miss Mannering, who has matured greatly in face and figure, understood perfectly what she was about, and she was convincingly the free and liberal-minded novelist, attractive to men and warm-hearted to all. She convincingly loved the man and she convincingly suffered alternate torments of doubt and revulsions of her finer feelings when the crisis came. She played straight for the substance of the drama. Charles Richman was her erring lover, making as convincing as he could Miss Crothers's somewhat feminine idea of a very masculine man. It must be admitted that her idea of a masculine man is rather too apt to be a vicious man. But to Miss Helen Ormsbee fell the most moving moment in the performance and she lived up to it. The author was present at the New York opening and was duly applauded, but she would not come forth to make a speech. That, wisely, she still leaves to the merely male dramatists.



“PILLARS OF SOCIETY” AND MRS.  
FISKE

LYCEUM THEATRE, March 28, 1910

Mrs. Fiske's latest adventure in Ibsen was as Lona Hessel in his satiric comedy, "Pillars of Society." Mrs. Fiske has in the past mounted various plays by Ibsen, — "A Doll's House," "Hedda Gabler," and two seasons ago "Rosmersholm." In contrast especially to the last, "Pillars of Society" is easily comprehensible to any theatre-goer, and by the same token, if you like, it is much less characteristically Ibsen. Written in 1877, its first act shows the dramatist not yet free from clumsy methods of exposition and the last act shows him deliberately and almost ludicrously dragging in a "happy ending" in obedience to sentimental considerations. The first act is in strange contrast, for example, to the first act of "Hedda Gabler." Ibsen uses it wholly for exposition, whereas in "Hedda Gabler" he had fully found himself; the drama begins with the first words and the exposition advances in the same speeches that further the action. In still stranger contrast with the Ibsen of maturer years is the last act of "Pillars of Society." By every token

a tragedy impends. That arch hypocrite, Consul Bernick, has sent out a ship with a rotten bottom, to kill, as he supposed, his enemy. His own son has, unknown to him, boarded her. The whole rotten bottom of his own life, patched with lies and hypocrisy, is thus ready to break, while the waters of retribution engulf him. But suddenly Ibsen calls down the god from the machine; he gives Consul Bernick a change of heart; he rescues the son from the ship; he even brings the ship back to port; he rushes about in the last act, indeed, quite as if he were remaking his play at the request of an American manager.

After all, it is rather pleasant to realize that the grim old Norseman was human. He was not born with his technique nor was he always above popular prejudice. And in "Pillars of Society," in spite of the over-elaboration of a rather simple plot and the decidedly local atmosphere of its scenes and characters, he did lay about him with joyous strokes at a brand of hypocrisy that is by no means confined to the Norway of 1877. Indeed, there is something almost pitifully personal to us in America just now about this play. Consul Bernick and his fellow-pillars of that smug, narrowly Puritanic Norse seaport were hailed as pillars because they were the richest men in town, because they gave parks and schools, because

they brought "improvements," such as railroads. They were pillars because they stood under the commercial prosperity of the place; but it will be noted that before they announced the branch railroad to the town they bought up all the land adjacent to it, at a dollar an acre. It will be noted also that self-aggrandizement was the real motive of most of their acts, and their smug domestic virtues were a pose that made the self-aggrandizement more easily painted to their fellows as love for the welfare of society.

They are not the exclusive possession of Norway, these men. Nor is the society which accepts them at their own valuation and hails them as its pillars confined to that drab land. The society which can hail Wall Street as its foundation is not a whit less parochial, and the courts and legislative committees of our fair and faultless land have in recent years uncovered a few Consul Bernicks, to say the least. Our society is not so narrowly Puritanic as that of Ibsen's seaport town, but have our pillars of society proved any more secure when their foundations were investigated? Society cannot be supported on a lie. "Nothing can bring you peace but yourself, nothing can bring you peace but the triumph of principle," said Emerson. That is Ibsen's message in "Pillars of Society," as in most of his

work. It is ringing with a bitter scorn of mere commercial success at the expense of the human soul. And it has its message for the New York of to-day. Perhaps, indeed, we are only just ready for it. It took a Hughes and a Roosevelt to prepare us for Ibsen.

While the message of the play is thus tinglingly contemporaneous, its technique is not. In fact "Pillars of Society" comes out on the stage curiously old-fashioned, not to say clumsy, in construction. In the reading of the play, the first act seems the poorest. In action the first act is the best, because it holds most closely the attention through its humor. Ibsen is plainly not yet master of his material. Tedious explanations clog the plot at every turn. No doubt a fund of local color and witty dialogue which conspired to make the original popular are inevitably lost here, while Mr. Archer's translation does not help any. But the public, after all, is not greatly concerned with technique. The satire of the play, the vividness and variety of the character drawing, the mordant humor, are what appeal; and doubtless these qualities led Mrs. Fiske, a shrewd woman, to revive it — the event has proved wisely. Moreover, the part of Lona affords her an opportunity, brief but sharp, for brilliant high comedy. Perhaps, too, she felt that the increased popularity of Ibsen in

recent years would bring a belated success for this piece. The part of Lona, to be sure, is hardly the leading part in the play, or would not be with any other actress portraying it. Mrs. Fiske has never been one to dread competition with her leading man. For the part of Consul Bernick she selected Holbrook Blinn, her companion in "Salvation Nell," and surely as good a choice as could be made for the character. He played this deluded hypocrite — for, if Bernick was a villain, he was, after all, a product as well as a pillar of his society — with admirable dignity, poise, expressive detail and delightful diction. It may be he was rather too dignified, too urbane, for this Norse town, and rather too restrained in his suggestion of hypocrisy for this satiric comedy. But his method of playing at least had the merit of making plausible his change of heart at the close, if it did not make quite plausible his villany at the beginning.

It was in competition with an actor of this stamp, playing the major personage in the drama, that Mrs. Fiske enacted the somewhat sketchy character of Lona. And, of course, her performance gained rather than lost by the juxtaposition. It is the devotion of Lona to Bernick, who had jilted her fifteen years before, that brings her back to Norway, where, with her direct, humorous, clear-sighted mind

and pungent speech, she is in vivid contrast to the other characters, and where she labors in her sly woman's way to drive Bernick voluntarily to confess his hypocrisy and stand or fall, at last, his true self. She is at once a character in Ibsen's play and Ibsen himself as chorus. As Mrs. Fiske plays her, of course, you realize only the character. What an honest, fresh-minded, unequivocal, humorous person she makes her! Her closing speech in the second act to the puzzled "What am I to do?" of Bernick — "You are to rise and support society, brother-in-law" — was a masterpiece of satiric comedy. But even finer was her acting of the closing scene, when Bernick was making his impassioned confession to the mob. Here the better and the more convincing was the acting of Mr. Blinn, of course the more convincing became the by-play of Mrs. Fiske. She sat quite still, on her face the joy of her spiritual victory over his baser nature writing itself out most marvellously and finally expressing itself in a little smothered sob of triumphant love which no other American actress would have invented, or could have executed if she had.

But the part of Lona, pungently as she illuminates its humors, vividly as she points its satiric lesson and brings to life its qualities of womanly devotion to the integrity of the



human spirit, to the soul, not the body of her lover, is not a part quite worthy the rich powers of her prime. She is too large for it; twenty ampler parts seem to await the opulence of her powers. She cribs herself — and her audiences watch in regret. Mrs. Fiske to-day is the one player most fitted by intellectual power and technical resources to become the leader of our stage. In part she has led, and does lead it, by producing with self-effacing devotion such works as “Pillars of Society.” But of her we may also demand the leadership and inspiration of great performances in great rôles.

### “LITTLE EYOLF” AND NAZIMOVA

NAZIMOVA'S THIRTY-NINTH STREET THEATRE, April 18, 1910

The latest of New York's tiny playhouses, modelled largely on the Maxine Elliott Theatre, is on West Thirty-ninth Street, almost next door to Miss Elliott's playhouse, and is called “Nazimova's Thirty-ninth Street Theatre.” It seats less than seven hundred persons, but it is cleverly constructed to seem of comfortable size — not a mere closet — and it is pleasing to the eye. The opening play was Ibsen's “Little Eyolf,”



and the Rita was, of course, Mme. Nazimova, who gave a performance of such superlative fineness that even those people who find the later dramas of Ibsen quite beyond their grasp were completely subdued by her spell. It easily ranks as one of the most potent acting achievements of the winter.

"Little Eyolf" was written and published in 1894, and it is still ahead of the times in the American theatre. It is ahead of the times because it contains the minimum of what we popularly understand (and demand) by "action," and the maximum of that exposition of the spiritual results of action. Ibsen never wrote a finer scene in the popular acceptance of what is "dramatic" than the death of little Eyolf at the end of act one. But all the rest of the play is but the revelation of what goes on in the souls of the mother and father after that death. Our theatrical public is not yet ready to call this drama; and, curiously, because it is not of the traditional stuff of the theatre it seems badly to muddle the comprehension of an audience who would find it, in a book, told by means of exposition rather than dialogue, probably quite understandable. Because we do not see what we are looking for, we do not understand what we see. An American theatrical audience can be strangely slow witted, after all.

“Little Eyolf,” in spite of the efforts of the commentators to bury it beneath a mass of silly symbolism, which would, if accepted, very justly spoil the play for any sensible, level-headed person, is nothing but the drama of a married couple who do not know how to conduct their lives. The woman is full — perhaps too full for a normal woman — of physical passion, and she loves her husband in that wise, and jealously. The husband is a rather ineffectual idealist, not a passionate man and not particularly in love with his wife. He has married her half under the snare of her beauty and half to gain the ease of her fortune. He has an introspective conscience, too; no hero of Hawthorne’s ever had more of it. There is more than a passing similarity between Hawthorne and Ibsen. He must “dedicate” himself to some cause, and, revolting from the hot, close passion his wife demands, he gives himself to their little crippled son, Eyolf. Little Eyolf thus separates husband and wife rather than draws them together, which, of course, is contrary to all the conventional canons of fiction and drama, and hence very “baffling.” When little Eyolf follows the Rat-wife and is drowned, the husband sees “retribution” in it. He accuses the wife. She, in turn, accuses him. “Sorrow makes them wicked and hateful.” Gradually

they strip their souls till they realize that Eyolf was, in truth, a "little stranger child" to them; he existed as a result of their passions, or ministered to their egotisms. As Shaw once wrote, the pair are "awakened by the blow to a frightful consciousness of themselves, — the woman as a mere animal, the man as a moonstruck nincompoop, keeping up appearances as a suburban lady and gentleman with nothing to do but enjoy themselves."

What is the outcome? The pair are landed proprietors. They realize the needs of the many poor little children on their estates. In Rita a true mother instinct at last awakes, and in Allmers the self-centred, perverted idealism which made him a type of the unconscious egotist, of virtue gone wrong, swings off its centre. In death little Eyolf at last draws them together in a marriage which promises mutual forbearance and service to society, which is based on common sense and sanity, which, chastened by grief and remorse, comes out of the hot, close boudoir into the place where unselfish work is done and into "the great silences" of spiritual aspiration. "Little Eyolf" is not a perverted nor an extravagant play; it is full of profound human significance. And its outcome is beautiful with hope and sweet with a large sanity. It is, however, written in a style so

charged with secondary meanings and so unsparingly stripped of all the usual "action" of the theatre that it baffles many people. And it requires consummate acting.

Consummate acting, at the hands of Mme. Nazimova, it certainly received. The present writer was not fortunate enough to have seen Miss Achurch play Rita when the play was first done in English, in London. But it is hard to conceive the part more effectively acted than by Nazimova. Certainly it has never been in this country. It was perfectly easy to foresee that her first act would be a triumph. It was not easy to foresee, nor even was it to be expected, that her later acts, and especially the conclusion of the play, would be informed with deep feeling and a beautiful, haunting sincerity, rising at the close to a true spiritual nobility. She played the first act in a key of suppressed passion and suspicious jealousy which in less skillful hands might easily have been inhuman and contributed to make Rita rather a monster than a suffering woman. But this she entirely avoided by the singular sincerity of certain underlying tones of tenderness in her voice and womanly devotion in her manner. The darting jealousies of her comments on Allmers's attitude toward Eyolf or Asta were barbed so keenly and shot so swiftly that the

audience frequently gasped with astonishment and pleasure at the sheer technical skill of her playing. But when she reached the famous "There stood your champagne, but you tasted it not," she neither blurted it out nor spoke it with vulgar scorn. She crooned it sadly, with smouldered passion of wistful reproach. The love it represented was the best she knew, physical though it was, and to her it was very deep and sacred. The audience was hushed. Never, surely, was this speech so robbed of every suggestion to tickle the prudes or the Yahoos. Yet never was it more significant, more charged with emotion, more illuminative of the play and the character. Of course, the final scene of act one she carried triumphantly to a thrilling curtain. The horror on her face kept the audience silent a full moment after the curtain fell.

But in the second act this extraordinary woman, this "tiger-cat in the leash of art," was no less tragically sincere in her remorse than she had been in her depiction of Rita's purring, feline physical passions. Words are but feeble things and they cannot suggest how vividly she brought to life the picture that haunted her brain of the great, open eyes of little Eyolf staring up at her through the deep water, nor the tragic droop of her mouth, nor the febrile, bewildered struggles of her mind

to grope a way out of the labyrinth of woe, nor the subtle upflarings of the still smouldering embers of jealousy. In the last act, the final awakening of the woman to a sane and just view of marriage and of life was indicated no less clearly and sincerely. It is in scenes of this character, as in the last act of "A Doll's House," that Nazimova has seemed most deficient in the past. Intellectual and spiritual suggestion has seemed to lie beyond her range. Yet here she caught the mood, perhaps because it strikes sharply through almost like a symbol, and is represented almost pictorially. Standing on the cliff in the moonlight, filled with a soft joy that she is to keep her husband as well as the joy of finding a work in the world to make her forget, or to atone for, the "great, staring eyes," she slowly lifted her face and then her hands to the heavens; and the curtain descended on her deep, sweet voice speaking the one word of thanks and on a picture that expressed to the eye with wonderful clarity the mood of the conclusion. It was beautifully planned and executed, a work of the finest and most intelligent imagination and suffused with the glamor of poetry.

The production, scenically, was excellent, and the supporting company fair. Like so many of Ibsen's men, Allmers talks a great deal and worries so much about his own soul



that you are rather vexed at him. It is a thankless part. Brandon Tynan could not redeem it from monotony, nor could he invest it with the air of intellectuality which rightly belongs to it, Allmers being a scholar. But he played it intelligently, none the less, with considerable feeling and without the strut and rant which might have been expected of him. Nazimova has subdued him to her naturalistic manner. Miss Ida Conquest played Asta, quite the best performance she has ever given in New York, clear in outline, calm and sweet and tender, yet with the requisite passion at the conclusion. The weak spot in the cast was Miss Gertrude Berkeley's Rat-wife. When Mrs. Campbell first played this rôle, she made the Rat-wife a celestial messenger, crooning so sweetly to little Eyolf that there was something unearthly about it. So it should be played. The Rat-wife has a certain homely realism, to be sure; but she enters the play, none the less, as a symbol of death; she represents Ibsen's unconquerable poetic whimsey, she gives to the drama that touch of unreality which makes so much of his work vastly different from the stark realism of the school. To play the Rat-wife merely as the "character old woman" of the conventional drama is to miss utterly the true effect.



## “HER HUSBAND’S WIFE”

GARRICK, May 9, 1910

Henry Miller, acting himself in a comparatively minor part, appeared in an unusual farce at the fag end of the season — “Her Husband’s Wife,” by A. E. Thomas, until recently a newspaper reporter. The farce is unusual, as farces go with the rank and file of our dramatists, because it is built upon an idea which is capable of something more than mechanical development, which has a true comedy ring, indeed; and because it is written with a grace, smartness and wit usually associated with the higher ranges of the drama, and is in most respects acted accordingly. It is often but a step from the farce of “Her Husband’s Wife” to the genuine comedy of satire or of character. Much of the interest lies less in the tangle of incident than in the mental perplexities and vacillations of the heroine. The affectionate fun the author has with that little, foolish, altogether adorable person is manifestly what interests him most and consequently what interests his audience most. And this is the stuff of comedy. Gilbert once said that it was doubtless funny to sit down in a pork pie, but a man didn’t have to sit down in a pork pie to be

funny. "Her Husband's Wife" follows this excellent principle.

The play is all about Irene Randolph and her hypochondriacal plot to get a second wife for her husband. Irene is sure she is going to die. Both her parents died young. They were drowned — which shows that hers is not a long-lived family. She takes pills and powders; she does not know what for; nobody knows what for; the doctors have all failed to find anything the matter with her. But she feels she should make an effort to live, so down go the unknown pills and powders. It is her wish to pick out a second wife for her poor Stuart — a wife who will do all for him that she has done without in the least being to him what she has been. In short, she picks out a very dowdy and plain woman. But Emily Ladew, the woman selected, is dowdy and plain because her love affair has been broken off and she does n't care how she looks. This offer to be, as she puts it, "a trained nurse," insults her feminine pride. She agrees to marry Stuart, but inwardly she resolves to make Irene suffer for the insult. This she successfully does by appearing in act two in radiant garments and a picture hat and making up to Stuart under the eyes of his wife like any hen-pheasant to a chanticleer. Of course Stuart knows nothing of what is going on, nor does

Irene's brother, who was the lover with whom Emily had quarreled. The complications which ensue are extremely amusing, and constructed according to the recognized canons of farce, resolving themselves finally, of course, in explanations and reconciliations all around.

Meanwhile the little wife, Irene, enmeshed in the web of her own plot, torn with conflicting emotions of jealous rage, self-reproach, and hypochondriacal devotion to her determination that she is going to die, is quite as amusing as the intricacies and confusions of the plot. She is, if you like, an impossible figure, a fantastic burlesque of certain feminine traits; but she is oddly human, none the less, and quite irresistibly alluring. You watch her moods with delighted sympathy and when, at the end, she orders all her medicine to be thrown away and settles down to the happy task of continuing as her husband's first wife, there is a quaint, sneaking little emotion of gladness in your heart, quite unlike the sentiments inspired by the usual personages in the usual farce. Gayly fantastic and even satiric as the whole piece is, including this character of Irene, there is about her the vital quality of life, that little flavor of humanity which belongs to true comedy. In the quiet, pretty ending which he has devised for the piece, Mr. Miller has recognized this quality and let the play speak at the close

sweetly, delicately, with the warm, sly humor that lurks in Mr. Thomas's writing at its best.

The part of Irene could not have been more happily played than it was by Miss Laura Hope Crews. Her Polly in "The Great Divide" is pleasantly remembered. But here she has ampler opportunity and she proves that she possesses more than a quaint, humorous and insinuatingly feminine personality. She uses a wide range of technical resource and displays the ability to compose a character and keep unerringly within it, and a quick, apt, and delicately pointed comic sense. Moreover, she plays with apparently complete unconsciousness of her audience and thus adds a charm of lifelikeness to the fun of farce. She was warmly acclaimed on the opening night, and has taken her place in the front rank of our younger actresses. Like Frank Worthing, she plays with a double edge. When her jealousy had finally mastered her desire to find a second wife for Stuart and she sought to discourage the other woman out of the bargain by describing to her, over the tea cups, Stuart's "terrible brutalities," Miss Crews put lemon in Emily's tea as if it were sugar, and sugar as if it were lemon, with indescribable honeyed spite, while she told her barefaced lies with such a pleading solemnity that the audience answered with delight. When her lies had quite overwhelmed

her, she fled tearfully from her uncle's bosom to her brother's almost as David Copperfield's Dora might have done, with delicious little plaintive whines. Before her husband, a note of tenderness and tears was sincerely sounded. And when she hissed, apropos of Emily's arrival in a trap with Stuart from the railroad station, "she *happened* to be driving by!" the emphasis on "happened" was a work of art. Miss Crews has here raised a whimsical character in a farce into the realms of comedy and endowed it with a bewitching personality, unerring naturalness, and picturesque variety.

The author himself is more interested in Irene than in his other characters, much more interested than he is in the character of the wise, shrewd, kindly old uncle, sharer of everybody's confidences, played by Mr. Miller. This part could, in no hands, escape a certain monotony and a secondary interest. It is not a part for a star, and Mr. Miller, in playing it, was very evidently thinking more of the success of the play as a whole than of any personal glory. He needed to do little but "jolly along" the people of the play, laugh behind his hand at their comic perplexities, and make brief love now and then himself to a widow, the object of a boyhood devotion, who seems to have been introduced in the plot for no other reason. Such a part, of course, makes but slight call upon Mr. Mil-

ler's resources, and perhaps he labors a trifle too hard to make it stand out. The play would have more artistic unity if the part had fallen to a less dominant actor, since the author, in adapting it for Mr. Miller, has been unable to build it up and fuse it successfully into the more important matters of his story. He has tried to write what is called a "Wyndham part," but he has not succeeded as the author of "The Mollusc" succeeded. The character is too much an outsider in the tale. Mr. Miller, however, has shrewdly cast the other parts, and throughout the guiding hand of his expert stage management is apparent — in the quiet speed of the piece, the absence of noise and meaningless runnings about and cheap horse-play; in the clean-cut enunciation of the players; in the pervasive spirit of good breeding, genial humor, wit, and humanity. Mr. Thomas has been fortunate in making his bow as a playwright with the aid of an actor-manager so capable of understanding his whimsical and often delicate fun and of reproducing it on the stage. Mr. Thomas will surely be heard from again, and often, in our theatre, and it is pleasant and profitable to chronicle at some length his initial success.

## THE BAD MORALS OF GOOD PLAYS

"THE PASSING OF THE THIRD FLOOR BACK"

"THE MAN FROM HOME"

"THE FIGHTING HOPE"

"THE WHIRLWIND"

In life there are two kinds of morals, yours and mine. In the drama there is a third kind, which has no relation to life whatever. We are often asked in the playhouse to accept as admirable, as moral, what is in reality contemptible, immoral; and, what is worse, we do so accept it. We check our own moral code in the cloak room before the play begins, and then are thrilled with pleasure by the most flagrantly immoral proceedings masquerading as virtue on the stage, or are warmed to a rich glow of sympathetic sanctity by situations which, upon analysis, are the negation of goodness. And this is entirely due to the fact that in the theatre we are carried along from moment to moment, without pausing to reflect upon cause or effect; and the dramatist is so carried along, also, in his desire to make each situation immediately effective, forgetting its larger significance. In other words, in the drama as elsewhere, a lack of clear thinking



down to the bed rock of principles is the cause of most of the falsity and misappreciation.

A play which enjoyed enormous vogue in New York during the winter of 1909-10 was "The Passing of the Third Floor Back," by Jerome K. Jerome, beautifully acted by that fine English artist, Mr. Forbes-Robertson, and acclaimed by nearly everyone as a drama of great moral import and spiritual regeneration. Mr. Forbes-Robertson enacted the part of a benign stranger, presumably an incarnation of the Christ-spirit, who came to a boarding-house filled with lying, scolding, bickering, cheating, unhappy beings, and by "calling to their better natures" reformed them one and all. They went down before the glance of his eye and the soft boom of his voice like nine-pins in an alley. And, as each sinner went down, as each reformation was accomplished, all the women in the audience wept. After each act strong New York men were so affected that they actually said "Excuse me," when they climbed over ladies' knees to get to the aisles.

Now, accepting this play as allegorical, it has great merits beyond its immediate theatrical effectiveness. It typifies with much beauty the regenerative forces of the Christ-spirit in man. But to accept it solely as an allegory is well nigh impossible, since all its characters, save the mysterious Passer-by, are drawn in

the key of realism and are unconsciously accepted by an audience as actual men and women, so that their regeneration seems to represent an actual process. What, in actual life, would be the process of reclaiming them? It would be a battle, a long-drawn battle. Unfortunately, men in this world are not turned from sinners to saints without a struggle, and usually a bitter struggle. They must confess, they must repent; but that is not enough. They must be led up from one stage of understanding to another, slowly, patiently, probably with frequent backslidings. In this world you can no more expect to make a thief realize in one day the moral beauty of honesty, nor a scold to lose in a warm glow of geniality all impulse to wrangle, than you can expect to turn darkness into light. But in "The Passing of The Third Floor Back" all the reforms are brought about without a struggle, simply by an hypnotic glance of the eye and the seed of a sweet suggestion.

To those men — and with one such I sat in the theatre — who have labored toilsomely to raise their fallen brothers and sisters, this play is almost as much a travesty as an allegory. It is a travesty, because in common with so much of the easy optimism of the day — the New Thought, or New Psychology, or new Law of Suggestion, or whatever it is called — it ig-

noses the practical basis of human struggle and human will in every true and lasting reformation, and sends away the beholder with a pleasant feeling that all that is needed to set the world aright are a few sweet thoughts and a call to "our better natures." Ah, you may call and call in this life, but it will do you little good! You must yourself go down to the stricken soul, and fight with him, and brace his will, and teach him like a little child, and at times be harsh with him, and give him a bath, and find him a job, and then, perhaps, after six months or a year or two years or three, you may have made a man of him. Ultimately, there is something dangerously immoral about "The Passing of the Third Floor Back" — immoral because it makes spiritual regeneration a matter of external and immediate suggestion, a kind of hypnotic process, instead of an inward education of the will and the moral senses; dangerous because it permits an audience to go away amiably self-satisfied, to lapse back fifteen minutes later into exactly their former state. In spite of its allegorical beauty, it inspires no real ethical purpose and no real thought, because it is based by the dramatist on no real thought, though doubtless his purpose was sincere enough. It does not touch the real principles of moral reformation.

Another play which for two seasons has enjoyed enormous popularity, "The Man from Home," illustrates a different phase of the curious morals of the drama. Perhaps it may seem that this Tarkington-Wilson comedy offends rather against good taste and good sense than morals. But ultimately what we acclaim it most warmly for is its glorification of the sturdy virtue and democratic simplicity of Kokomo, Indiana, as against the rottenness and snobbery of effete Europe. And, of course, thoughtfully considered, it actually renders these estimable virtues ridiculous and mean by ignoring or falsifying all the rest of the picture. In the playhouse, having checked everything but our jingo patriotism in the cloak room, we madly applaud Daniel Voorhees Pike, of Kokomo. What he would be, under actual conditions, is a rather uncouth boor, making a fool of himself and America.

If the authors of this play had held up Daniel Voorhees Pike as a type to be studied that would be another matter. But they have obviously held him up as a hero to be admired. Now, rudeness, ignorance, narrow-mindedness, are never admirable. And the man who thinks, acts and speaks at any and all times on the assumption that the town hall of Kokomo is more beautiful because it is in Kokomo, which is in Indiana, which is in the United

States of America, than St. Peter's in Rome, or the Acropolis at Athens, or the Doges' Palace in Venice, is no whit less a snob than the European aristocrat who thinks that his fifteen generations of fine-mannered ancestors make him the superior of Daniel. In fact, the impartial observer, who managed to slip past the cloak room, has a certain sympathy with the aristocrat. Possibly this observer has been both in Kokomo and Sorrento — where the scene of the play is laid. Somehow, the sweep of that blue Bay and the eternal mystery of Italy call him still, though he can remain absent from Kokomo without a regret.

Matthew Arnold, in his lecture on Emerson, pointed out as some of America's dangers "the absence of the discipline of respect; . . . hardness and materialism; exaggeration and boastfulness; . . . a false smartness, a false audacity, a want of soul and delicacy." And of Emerson he said, "To us he shows for guidance his lucid freedom, his cheerfulness and hope; to you his dignity, delicacy, serenity, elevation."

Daniel Voorhees Pike was certainly not disciplined in respect; and did he not possess just these dangerous qualities of false smartness, false audacity, exaggeration and boastfulness? Certainly he did not possess dignity, delicacy, serenity, elevation. They are moral attributes,

and just so far as he is held up as a hero without them he is lacking in moral worth and soundness; and the play is lacking in moral worth and soundness, were it not still further made immoral by its falsification of European society, its abandoned disregard of anything good in the Old World, to make an Indian holiday. "The Man from Home" is not based on justice, but jingoism. It is not thought out to first principles. It responds to an emotional test, but not to an intellectual.

Of course, the most flagrant cases of immorality parading as virtue are to be found, not in plays like these, which have none the less decided literary or human merit, but in plays of a more melodramatic order, where the author was in reality working to pile up situations and which we, by a total suppression of our intelligences, have come somehow to accept as enjoyable, even emotionally stirring. Such plays make little claim on serious attention, and it would not be worth while to consider them here were it not for this very fact that we do yield to their spell in the theatre and submit to seeing some of our best actresses portray their heroines. For the quaint or bloody morals of an elder day, our historic sense very properly makes allowances, and we do not hold Elizabethan drama up to the code of the Twentieth Century. The trouble is, we do not hold much



of the Twentieth Century drama up to the code of the Twentieth Century. We make an assumption that the plays of mechanical suspense, of melodramatic appeal, are excused from living up to the moral law. But every time we do this, every time we give emotional response to the weeping heroine of an ethically false and illogical melodrama, we weaken our perception of fundamental truth in the playhouse, we unconsciously debase our standards for more serious drama. There is no reason whatever why even a melodrama cannot be ethically sound and logical. There is every reason why we should insist upon its being so. Sloppy, sentimental thinking is dangerous wherever it occurs, even in the playhouses of Mr. Belasco.

One of the best (or the worst) examples of false ethics in such a play is furnished by "The Fighting Hope," produced by Mr. Belasco in the Autumn of 1908, and acted by Miss Blanche Bates. In this play a man, Granger, has been jailed, his wife and the world believe for another man's crime. The other man, Burton Temple, is president of the bank Granger has been convicted of robbing. A district attorney, hot after the men higher up, is about to reopen the case. It begins to look bad for Temple. Mrs. Granger, disguised as a stenographer, goes to his house to secure evidence



against him. What she secures is a letter proving that not he, but her husband, was after all the criminal.

Of course this letter is a knockout blow for her. She realizes that "the father of her boys" is a thief, that the man she would send to jail (and with whom you know the dramatist is going to make her finally fall in love) is innocent. Still, in her first shock, her instinct to protect "the father of her boys" persists, and she burns the letter.

So far, so good, but Mrs. Granger is represented as a woman of fine instincts and character. That she should persist in cooler blood in her false and immoral supposition that her boys' name will be protected or their happiness preserved — to say nothing of her own — by the guilt of two parents instead of one, is hard to believe. Yet that is exactly what the play asks you to believe, and it asks you to assume that here is a true dilemma. A babbling old housekeeper, whose chief use in the house seems to be to help the plot along, after the manner of stage servants, tells Mrs. Granger that she must not atone for her act by giving honest testimony in court, that of course she must let an innocent man go to jail, to "save her boys' good name."

It would be much more sensible should Mrs. Granger here strike the immoral old lady, in-

stead of saving her blows for her cur of a husband, in the last act, who, after all, was "the father of her boys." But she listens to her. She appears actually in doubt not only as to which course she will pursue, but which she should pursue. She is intended by the dramatist as a pitiable object because on the one hand she feels it right to save an innocent man (whom she has begun to love), and on the other feels it her duty to save her sons' happiness by building their future on a structure of lies and deceit. And she reaches a solution, not by reasoning the tangle out, not by any real thought for her boys, their genuine moral welfare, not by any attention to principles, but simply by discovering that her husband has been sexually unfaithful to her. Further, he becomes a cad and charges her with infidelity. Then she springs upon him and beats him with her fists, which is not the most effective way of convincing an audience that she was a woman capable of being torn by moral problems.

Of course, as the play is written, there is no moral problem. The morality is all of the theatre. It belongs to that strange world behind the proscenium, wherein we gaze, and gazing sometimes utter chatter about "strong situations," "stirring climaxes," and the like, as people hypnotized. There might have been a

moral problem if Mrs. Granger, before she discovered her husband's guilt, had been forced to fight a rising tide of passion for Temple in her own heart. There might have been a moral problem after the discovery and her first hasty, but natural, destruction of the letter, if she had felt that her desire to save Temple was prompted by a passion still illicit, rather than by justice. But no such real problems were presented. The lady babbles eternally of "saving her boys' good name," while you are supposed to weep for her plight. Unless you have checked your sense of reality in the cloak room, you scorn her perceptions and despise her standards. How much finer had she continued to love her husband! But he, after all, was only "the father of her boys."

And yet this play, with Mr. Belasco's stamp upon it, went the rounds of the theatres for two whole years and gave evident pleasure to thousands of people, many of whom would doubtless be sorely perplexed at Ibsen's "Pillars of Society," which depicts the misery of a life based on lies and deceit, which is truly moral. In actual life, these thousands of people are probably honest and upright and would cut off their right hands before sending an honest man to jail or raising their children on lies. But they do not carry their principles into the playhouse. Once there,

they do not look behind the momentary situation. They are moved by falsity as readily as by truth.

There was produced in Chicago in March, 1910, a play by Jules Goodman, called "Mother," one of those plays technically described as possessing "heart interest." A mother is shown making all possible sacrifices for her erring offspring, who lie, forge, and insult her. But Mother shoulders all trials and all blame, even for the forgery. You are obviously expected to admire as well as to pity her, to regard her as a noble embodiment of "mother love." Actually, the speech and conduct of her children show that she was but ill fitted for the duties of motherhood, and in so far quite the opposite of admirable. Here is a play of the type known as "wholesome," and intended to impart a great moral uplift. Actually, while it makes susceptible female auditors weep and have a perfectly lovely time, it is based on immorality, on that terrible and often innocent immorality of incompetent parenthood. Had the author sincerely thought out the meaning of his play, had he reasoned down to first principles, he would have made this mother's acts not those of moral heroism but of belated atonement.

Then, of course, his play would not have been so immediately and widely popular!

Thought is seldom immediately and widely popular in the theatre.

A classic case of the strange morality in the play of theatric suspense (called "the well-made play" because it is often made so badly) is furnished by Sardou's "Fedora." As G. B. Shaw once pointed out, the hero is suspected by the heroine of having been a Nihilist, at a time when to be a Nihilist in Russia was to be a hero in most other countries — if it is not so still. She repudiates him, but he regains completely her confidence by proving that he is no Nihilist, but simply a common murderer, who killed his man out of jealousy!

It is not needful to go back to Sardou for such examples, however. At Daly's Theatre, New York, in the Spring of 1910, Bernstein's drama, "The Whirlwind," was presented in English, and we were edified by the spectacle of as strange a collection of stage morals as ever went to the making of "emotional situations." One man announces to another that he is going to shoot himself. The second man, who has suggested to the first that he go to America since his presence in France compromises the second man's daughter, interposes only a momentary objection. What if he should prevent? That would spoil the climax! So, very gravely, solemnly, as befits one taking his last look upon those about to die, this second

man gathers up his hat and stick, makes a grave, solemn bow, and passes out of the room. One of the most popular dramatists in France solemnly wrote this scene without a hint that he did not regard it as entirely credible and human. An American stage manager solemnly staged it, as entirely credible and human, in a Broadway theatre in 1910. And, as entirely credible and human, American audiences sat breathlessly and watched it. But such stage morality as this, of course, becomes too preposterous to deceive anybody very long. Most of the plays of Bernstein are a passing fad, startling us into momentary attention by their sensationalism, like a yellow journal by its lurid headlines. Ultimately, we get back a portion of our intelligences from the coat room.

Two or three years ago Arnold Daly produced a play called "The Regeneration." The hero was a Bowery thug, partly from natural instinct but much more from environment. But he was a commendable moral crook. He was "on the level" with his pals, observed the thieves' code of honor, was true to his "woman." But he became regenerated. He went to a settlement and "got religion," thanks to a pretty petticoat worker from upper Fifth Avenue. As soon as this moral regeneration was accomplished, he shoved back his



"woman" into the gutter, he was false to his old pals, he violated every one of the decent, honorable instincts which had hitherto kept him human. And you were supposed to applaud. Such is morality on the stage!

And such is morality on the stage because it is vastly easier in the drama to write what is momentarily effective than what is fundamentally true. Here, or in any play of similar type, it is easy and picturesque to cause your hero suddenly to rise from prayer regenerate and spurn in ringing words his past life. It is easy for the author of "The Passing of the Third Floor Back" to show his mysterious Passer-by looking into the eyes of the Painted Lady, and then to show her, in the next act, with the paint washed off. It is easy to show a frail little mother shouldering the crimes of her boys, and doubly easy to make your audience gush tears at the sight. If the ethical problems of life were only so simple as that! But they are not. They are bitterly complex; they stem back into the past and forward into the future; and to picture them truly in drama requires not only technique, but hard, diligent, unsparing thought. The drama which is written without thought is writ in water.

It requires technique, obviously, because the dramatist has no means of explanation but the



mouths and visible deeds of his characters, and to make the momentary situation, the passing speech, not only tell as life-like action but also as exposition of what has gone before or is to follow after, is the hardest task which confronts the craftsman in any art whatsoever. It requires hard, patient thought, because no moral problem in this world, no question of conduct, is easy of solution. If the dramatist regards his stage people and his stage situations as representative of life, he must judge conduct, weigh motives and arrange the outcome of deeds with all the care he would bestow upon human beings in like predicament. Without such thought he may concoct a play temporarily successful in the theatre, but he cannot write a play which will bring him enduring fame, because it will lack the firm foundation of sound moral principle. In the long run you can no more successfully defy moral principle in the drama than in the world.

Two recent American plays written with honest, painstaking search for what their authors conceived as the real moral issues are Eugene Walter's drama of the poor little chorus girl, "The Easiest Way," and William Vaughan Moody's drama of spiritual pragmatism, "The Great Divide." How high these plays outtop the bulk of contemporary American drama, even in popular estimation, is due

not alone to their theatrical effectiveness, in the obvious sense, but to their quality of ethical significance. There is no "mush" about them, no theatrical hysteria, no blinking at the ultimate facts. They go down after first principles. That is what every drama must do which raises a moral issue, if it is to endure. That is why "The Servant in the House" is a better play than "The Passing of the Third Floor Back." And that is why Ibsen looms so large in dramatic history.

It was not much the fashion, before Ibsen, to raise moral issues in the drama written in English — at any rate consciously. Since Ibsen, in all lands, what the drama has lost in pure narrative interest, in poetry and romance, it has gained in sociological import. We now use the stage to correct social abuses, to preach vegetarianism, telepathy, Christian Science, to proselytize for religion, to do a thousand and one things of more or less ethical value, before undreamed. The craftsmen of the theatre admire Ibsen for the wonderful technique he has forged for their use, a technique which has boiled away soliloquys and asides and fused the exposition with the progress of the drama. But the thoughtful layman admires him most for his unsparing tracking down of principles, his uncompromising refusal to gain a momentary effect, however telling, at the expense of the

whole truth. Several of his plays have been popular in our theatre and are growing more so. Others have not been popular. The Philistines have scoffed. Many of us have more or less honestly professed that we did not comprehend. Much ink has been spilled. Names have been called. But meantime Ibsen's influence continues to grow, and that influence is more important than any specific play he ever wrote.

That influence is an influence for moral honesty in the drama, against the shams of stage conventions; for principles against stage trickery. There is not a moment in "Pillars of Society" when the words or actions of that arch hypocrite, Consul Bernick, are not carefully calculated to tell at their true ethical value for the beholder. In "Little Eyolf" and "A Doll's House" problems of marriage are raised and faced squarely to the bitter end. In "Ghosts" the morals of the play go back from the son to the father with horrible insistence. This man troubles, disturbs, even shocks us in the theatre, because we have been too much accustomed to accept any ethics in the playhouse so long as it resulted in scenes of momentary effectiveness, and too little accustomed to holding hard on principles. Ibsen makes his momentary situations so dependent for their force on remote causes that his plays baffle us

as life baffles us — and we say that we cannot understand him!

It has been the mission of Ibsen, in part through his direct appeal to audiences, in still larger part through his appeal to other playwrights, to create dissatisfaction with sentimentalized or false morality in the drama, to teach the need when a moral issue is raised of facing it squarely and honestly and holding the whole play true to its underlying principles. Why is it so very difficult for some worthy theatre-goers to understand his significance?

In 1909 Joseph Medill Patterson produced a play in New York called "The Fourth Estate," which showed vividly and sincerely the difficulties of conducting a modern American newspaper with absolute honesty, ignoring all the seductions of advertising, social, and political patronage. His morality in that play was sound and uncompromising and his conclusion was at first tragic. But the New York theatre-goers first imposed a happy ending and later rejected the play altogether. Fortunately, Chicago was more receptive. But there was a play — not without its faults of clumsy construction and beginner's crudeness, to be sure — which was "thought out," which raised a moral issue, looked at it in all its phases, and then bent every episode of the drama to conform to the principle at stake, instead of ignor-

ing the principle to make the situations momentarily appealing to the emotions of the mob. Such another play, too, which raised a moral issue, thought it out, both its causes and its effects, and held the episodes of the drama true to it, was Miss Rachel Crothers's "A Man's World," acted by Miss Mary Mannering.

These were two of the most interesting and significant native plays of the winter of 1909-10. Their authors, having propounded a moral question, like Ibsen met it unflinchingly, putting away temptation for the easy tear or the loud guffaw, for the momentary theatrical thrill, in the interests of significant truth. These authors have the sense and the courage to think not of what the public wants — or what they may suppose it wants — but of what is the real meaning, the cause and solution, of the moral problems their plays present. Until our playwrights do this, we cannot have a serious and significant drama of contemporary American life, because we cannot have a drama which holds fast to real moral principles, to reality. Fortunately, however, by every sign our better playwrights are thinking less and less of what seems immediately effective in the theatre and more and more of what is ultimately true. And what is ultimately true is, after all, what is ultimately effective, even on Broadway.

## BARE FEET AND BEETHOVEN

## A TERPSICHOREAN FANTASY

[A curious craze to witness the "interpretation" of music in terms of the dance, especially the dance of females unencumbered even by the scant costume of the traditional ballet, swept over the country during the season of 1909-10, having begun with the dances of Miss Duncan and the Salome posturings of Miss Gertrude Hoffman during the previous year. Carnegie Hall and the Metropolitan Opera House in New York, the sacred precincts of Symphony Hall in Boston, and other temples of music, were given over to the display of gyrating females with bare legs. The phenomenon was, perhaps, unintelligible to the mere male — save in one obvious respect; but the impression which it made upon the present writer is adequately expressed in the skit which follows.]

## CHARACTERS

IZZY-DO-A CANCAN.

MAUD ALL-LINE.

RUTH SANDY-KNEE.

TA-RA-RA DE SWIRLSKY.

GERTRUDE HOPMAN.

LOIE FOOL-YER.

THE GHOST OF LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN.

THE BOSTON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA.

THE PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA.

THE KNEISEL QUARTET.

CHORUS OF MUSES.

MUSIC kindly furnished by MOZART, HANDEL, BEETHOVEN, MENDELSSOHN, RICHARD STRAUSS, CHOPIN, GEORGE M. COHAN, and others.

COSTUMES by the ADAM & EVE COMPANY, LIMITED, Fig Lane, Garden of Eden.

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EXPLANATORY PROLOGUE, *spoken by the GHOST OF*  
BEETHOVEN

“Ladies — and the gentleman in the second row to the left:

“In my day — which, as some of you may be aware, was a long time ago — silly people were content to listen to music. They did not demand program notes; they thought, poor things, that they understood a symphony without the aid of a dancer to interpret it; they were ignorantly unacquainted with the subtle connection between a thematic melody proclaimed by the wood-winds and waving arms; between the contrapuntal development of a fugue and bare feet. Those were the elder days of art. What an esthetic darkness we labored in!

“Now, I am happy to say, all this has been changed. Music is no longer simply music.



First my good friend Richard Strauss saw to that, and next my equally good friend Izzy-do-a Can-can still further developed the field. Bare feet have at last taken their rightful place in the interpretation of orchestral music. No orchestra is complete any longer without at least one pair. Had I known enough when I composed my symphonies, I should have scored them for strings, wood-wind, drums, cymbals, and ladies' legs.

"Excellent as is the intelligence of those dancers who have interpreted my works, I must, as a conscientious composer, admit that had I written all the parts myself I should have arranged some of my effects differently. Take the opening of my Fifth Symphony, for example. There, instead of the justly famed knocking of fate being sounded by the kettle-drums and strings, why not have the dancer kick at the door? It would be nothing less than superb! No true artist would object on the ground of being barefoot.

"But I digress. We are met here this afternoon, ladies — and the gentleman in the second row to the left — for a grand musical orgy. Several musicians of some local celebrity have kindly consented to furnish incidental sounds, which will be played by many internationally celebrated bare feet, aided by the Boston Symphony Orchestra and the New York Philhar-

monic band. You will also be glad to hear, I am sure, that my friend Franz Kneisel, who hitherto has shown a rather hidebound and narrowly conservative spirit toward the new art, has at last consented to add a pair of legs to his excellent organization, and that that organization will henceforth be heard in bedchamber music.

“The concert will conclude with a grand finale by all the dancers and a chorus of muses, both bands, and the bedchamber quartet, with other attractions yet to be announced.

“The first number on our program, ladies — and the gentleman in the second row to the left — will be an interpretation by Miss Ruth Sandy-knee of the well-known Buddhist doctrine of Nirvana. Nirvana, I need hardly remind you, means, to the Hindu, annihilation, nothingness. Lights down, please!”

*The house is plunged in darkness. The curtains part, disclosing a dimly lighted stage, with one bright spot in the centre. Into this bright spot comes Miss Ruth Sandy-knee. As the light streams full upon her, the significance of her dance is apparent. She represents Nirvana — nothingness — by her costume.*

*As the curtains close again, the ladies in the audience gasp:*

*“How subtle!”*

THE GHOST OF BEETHOVEN — “Now, ladies

— and the gentleman in the second row to the left — we will listen to a dance by Miss Maud All-line, with sounds by Mr. Kneisel's men — my Quartet in C Sharp Minor, Opus 131 — the one which has given a century of critics so much difficulty to understand."

*The curtains part, disclosing the four musicians seated at the extreme rear of the stage, in a corner. They play. Miss Maud All-line bursts through the heavy draperies at the back. She is clad in a yard of mosquito-netting and a sweet smile, which rapidly changes to a look of unutterable woe. She waves her arms above her head unceasingly, does a few simple steps with her bare feet round and round the stage, monotonously, and finally falls in a heap. The curtains close, and the ladies murmur:*

*"We never understood Beethoven's quartet before!"*

THE GHOST OF BEETHOVEN — "I am sure, ladies — and the gentleman in the second row to the left — that you now grasp fully my meaning in this composition. I did not quite realize myself, before, what I meant. In fact, I thought it was something quite different. We will now listen to a dance by Miss Ta-ra-ra de Swirlsky, with incidental sounds by Mr. Mahler's band — the Fifth Nocturne and a prelude, both by Chopin. I regret that the composer could not be present in person. He was

unavoidably detained by a bad attack of temperature — I mean temperament. But he sent word that he was glad to learn of his mistake. You see, he thought he had composed these pieces to be played upon the old-fashioned pianoforte!”

*The curtains part. Mr. Mahler takes his place before the band, which is concealed in the cellar. Miss Ta-ra-ra de Swirlsky enters, wearing a similar costume to Miss All-line, save that her mosquito-netting is red and she uses a different brand of dental paste. She waves her arms rather less than Miss All-line, but she interprets much more energetically with her other members. The subtle differentiation of her interpretation is best indicated by the fact that she does not fall down upon the stage at the conclusion. This shows that Chopin, in the Fifth Nocturne had not yet reached the depth of cosmic philosophy attained by Beethoven when he wrote his great quartet. As the curtains close, the ladies murmur ecstatically.*

THE GHOST OF BEETHOVEN — “Next, ladies — and the gentleman in the second row to the left — we will listen to a dance by Miss Izzy-do-a Cancan, with incidental sounds by the Boston Symphony Orchestra. The work chosen for interpretation is none other than my Seventh Symphony.”

*The curtains part, showing that the stage*

*hangings have been changed to baby-blue. Miss Izzy-do-a Cancan appears, clad in a white lace pocket-handkerchief. She, too, waves her arms and circles the stage, but it may be noted, by careful observation, that she occasionally dances. This is the subtle fragrance of her interpretation, its glorious intellectuality. The symphony is based upon dance rhythms! She occasionally dances!! The ladies explain this to one another after the curtains close again. There is a rustling murmur of excitement. It is almost educational.*

THE GHOST OF BEETHOVEN — “And now, ladies — and the gentleman in the second row to the left — why, where has he gone? — well, no matter — now, ladies, I have a regrettable announcement to make. Miss All-line and Miss Hopman were to have interpreted in turn, for purposes of artistic comparison, the dance of Salome. But this number will have to be omitted. The management, you see, seriously objected. They refused to allow any dead heads in the house! So, instead, Miss All-line and Miss Hopman have kindly consented to give, one after the other, interpretations of Mendelssohn’s ‘Spring Song,’ played by the combined Boston Symphony and New York Philharmonic Orchestras, with six automobile-horns and a wind-machine for realistic atmosphere.”

*The curtains part, disclosing Miss All-line modestly clad in a white tulle veil, which reaches to her ankles. She runs lightly round and round the stage picking up tacks, which she subtly interprets as wild flowers and sniffs at ecstatically. The ladies, at the conclusion, murmur:*

*“Did you see her costume—long and warm? That means that she interprets the spring of a northern clime—a New England spring, perhaps. Is it not wonderful?”*

*Once more the music begins down cellar, and enter Miss Gertrude Hopman, clad in a red rosebud. Miss Hopman hops up and down, and she is followed by all the Muses, who also hop up and down. Red paper roses and other vivid flowers are scattered about the stage. Little bare boys enter, playing upon property pipes of Pan. The dance grows animated. The ladies murmur:*

*“Again wonderful! Hers is the spring of the sunny southland—her costume indicated that, and the red, red flowers. It is a pagan spring; the other was Puritan. Isn’t it marvelous that Mendelssohn could thus conceal two meanings in his pretty work?”*

THE GHOST OF BEETHOVEN — “Now, ladies, I have a treat for you. Miss Loie Fool-yer will interpret the ‘Hallelujah Chorus,’ from Handel’s ‘Messiah,’ with her hands.”



*The house is plunged in darkness. The curtains part, showing a black stage, with the dim figures of the Muses crouching upon it. At the rear, in a bright spotlight shed down from above, stands Miss Fool-ye, in a black robe and cowl, so that only her white arms and hands are visible. As the music sounds, she lifts her arms, the hands flapping loosely from the wrists, and waves them in time to the band. Gradually she raises them higher and higher, finally clapping them together. The Muses suddenly rise and a spot-light falls upon each. They, too, clap their hands. Everybody claps her hands. The Ghost of Beethoven claps his hands. The curtains close amid a thunder of applause.*

THE GHOST OF BEETHOVEN — “I am sure, ladies, that you have been impressed alike by the novelty of this performance, its revelation of hitherto unguessed forms of musical expression, and by its deep religious devotion. It was, indeed, the ‘Rhapsody of the Glad Hand’! Our program will now conclude with a grand finale by all the dancers, the Muses, the combined orchestra, and the bedchamber quartet, together with the automobile-horns, the wind-machine, six jew’s-harps, and a pony ballet of clog-dancers performing on a sounding-board behind the scenes. The work chosen for interpretation is none other than Mr.



George M. Cohan's justly admired masterpiece, 'Harrigan.'

"The ladies are politely requested to keep their seats and not to put on their hats and rubbers until the conclusion of the performance. We wish to preserve the artistic continuity of the mood."

*The curtains part, showing bright green hangings, with Irish harps prominently displayed. Over all is draped an American flag, tied with green bows. The music opens with a fanfare of automobile-horns, followed by a moaning andante on the wind-machine, a brace of resonant chords from the jew's-harps, and then the full orchestra, forte, the rhythm accentuated by the clog-steppers in the wings. The dancers enter with a whirl, clad in green gauze, with shamrock wreaths in their hair. In addition to this symbolism of their costume, their interpretation of this difficult and obscure piece of music is of wonderful subtlety. Each dances just as her personal whim dictates. This signifies Home Rule!*

*The audience goes mad with esthetic enthusiasm and crowds toward the stage, recklessly hurling bunches of violets, boxes of candy, orchids, powder-puffs and gold net purses at the dancers, who show their skill by picking up these tokens of appreciation without losing the rhythm.*

*At the conclusion of the concert, the dancers are seen, wrapped in furs, leaving the stage entrance in their motor-cars. The Ghost of Beethoven, in a threadbare coat of ancient pattern, starts shivering toward the Subway.*

## Part III



## SOME POPULAR ERRORS IN THE JUDGMENT OF ACTING

“WHY do people fight over the question, ‘Is John Drew an actor’?” asked the Critic, wearily. “As if there were any doubt about it!”

“You mean he is n’t?” said the Mere Person.

“I mean he is!” roared the Critic.

“How do you make that out?” said the Mere Person, with annoying independence. “He always plays himself.”

“One of the hardest of all things to play — and make it interesting!” the Critic retorted. “Try it once yourself.”

“Well, you need n’t get personal,” the other replied. “And you’ll have to show me.”

And so the ever-burning topic, “Is John Drew an actor?” was once more thrashed out.

You, Gentle Reader, have more or less gently joined in that debate, have you not? Of course you were on the Critic’s side; but *somebody* took the other side. How is it possible that there should be another side? Why should we

not call a proficient artist like Mr. Drew an actor, just as we call Caruso a singer?

It is because the art of acting is more generally observed and commented upon by the public, and less generally understood, than any other art; the standards are confused, the principles misconceived, and the technical problems unfamiliar. Most of us who know nothing about music are sensible enough to let those who do say at least the final word about the merits of a singer or a violinist. Most of us who are unfamiliar with pictures are humbly disposed to accept the judgment of experts, or to try to learn wisdom where we have it not. But of plays, and more especially of acting, every last one of us, from the Tired Business Man to his weary wife and chocolate-drop-consuming daughter, "knows what he likes," and is ready with a dogmatic opinion at tea table or dinner board. And no two of us mean quite the same thing by acting, no two of us judge it by the same standards. We judge it according to personal whim, not artistic laws — for acting has its laws. And, as a result, there is more foolish chatter about the stage than about any other subject men and women expend their breath upon.

Acting, of course, first and foremost, is the art of expressing with the body, the voice, the manner, the playwright's conception of a char-

acter and the playwright's meaning in his play. The test is not at all whether the actor looked and talked like somebody else than himself, but whether, even if he did look and talk like himself, he made himself fit consistently with the character of the play, and left at the close a definite idea of the author's intentions.

Now, suppose that you dressed up like Santa Claus, with beard and cap and cloak, assumed a strange voice and rolling gait, and endeavored to hoax your kiddies. Would not your task be much easier than if you appeared before them in your proper person and told them you were the gas man come to read the meter? We are all more or less children in the theatre; we go there to "pretend," and to watch others "pretend." And it is by no means the sign of superior acting that we are more fooled by the man who wears the false whiskers, in other words by what the players call the "character actor."

One of the most common of all errors in the judgment of acting, indeed, is the failure to realize the greater difficulty of playing a "straight part," over playing a "character part." It is simply because the present generation knows Mr. Drew only as an actor in "straight parts" that it is possible for anybody to question his ability to act.

By a character part is meant not alone a part



which calls for a greater or less disguising of the actor's form or features, a sharp contrast between his actual appearance and his stage appearance, a physical impersonation; but any part which is sharply defined as a type or departs vividly from the normal of the audience. In such a play as "Shore Acres," for example, practically all the rôles were character parts, according to the professional definition. In "The Passing of the Third Floor Back" they are all character parts, their very titles defining them as such — "A Painted Lady," "A Shrew," "A Cheat," and so on. They are clearly marked types, their outlines sharply indicated by the author.

A straight part, on the other hand, is one which presents no sharp outlines, which does not depart from the normal, which represents what is, for the audience, the average man or woman. Because the actor naturally chosen for such a part is himself such a man, he plays it without disguise of make-up and tries to give it charm and interest and vividness according to the measure of his own personality as well as of his art. But just because of this fact, just because of the obvious infusion of his personality, while his technical difficulties are greater than those of the character actor, the public, knowing nothing of technical problems, declares dogmatically that he is no actor, that he

is "just playing himself." It may, however, be noted that this same public unconsciously recognizes his art by going season after season to see him play, although attributing his merits entirely to his personality. Personality alone never carried any player very far.

In the majority of plays the character parts and the straight parts go side by side. During the performance, it is the former we often seem to enjoy the more. But it will be noted that the leading actors are usually playing the latter. The players will tell you this is because it is comparatively easy to find character actors; it is extremely difficult to secure adequate interpreters for the straight parts. "The character actors," they would express it, "get \$50 a week, the 'straight leading men,' who look like gentlemen, know how to hold a tea cup, and can make convincing love, get \$400." And it is not alone, nor even chiefly, personality which is thus rewarded. It is largely technical proficiency.

Mr. Forbes-Robertson's company, playing "The Passing of the Third Floor Back," has been highly praised for its excellence; it has, indeed, been held up as an example of what an English company can be, to shame our native players. Yet it is in no wise an exceptional company. If the same actors were to appear in a high comedy of modern manners, playing straight parts, we should at once indignantly

declare that if Mr. Forbes-Robertson fancies he can bring over such an aggregation of second rate players to America and fool us, he is mightily mistaken! Indeed, if the numerous rôles in "The Passing of the Third Floor Back," all of which are important and constantly on view, were not character parts, Mr. Forbes-Robertson could not afford to bring the play to America at all, because he could not afford to pay the salaries. Salaries are determined by the laws of supply and demand. If it is not more difficult to play a straight part, why should the supply of players be so much smaller?

The character part, of course, offers to the player a definite, sharp mould. His work has been more than half done by the playwright. The straight part offers to the player little more than an opportunity, and what he makes of it depends largely on himself. The plays of Clyde Fitch were noted for their wealth of small but vivid and amusing character parts — "bits," the actors call them. When those plays were first presented the public used to greet each new character rôle with delight, and predict great things of the actor or actress who portrayed it so vividly. The star, or the leading man, on the other hand, used frequently to be dismissed with the remark that "they were just playing themselves again." I have watched these same

plays later, on the road or produced by stock companies, and seen other players get exactly the same effects in the character parts. And where are the players to-day of whom such great things were originally predicted? They are still playing "bits." Some of them, to be sure, were promoted into larger rôles, and it was then discovered that they could not act. Their parts had done the trick, not they. Meanwhile the despised stars, who had "only played themselves," are still prominently before the public, because they can act.

For, if a play is respectably written, it falls not on the character "bits" to carry its meaning and its real emotional appeal but on the leading rôles. In the modern drama probably the majority of these leading rôles are straight parts. Under our so-called star system, a popular player selects a rôle which seems to chime with his or her physical attributes and temperament, and then plays it without any disguise. Now this, in reality, is quite as much of a hindrance as a help. Let a young man don a gray wig, totter over a cane, speak in a cracked falsetto, and if his imitation of old age is at all faithful half the audience will declare he is acting. Let the same young man, in his proper person, go through a play making delicately every point indicated by the author, leaving at the end a definite and correct impression of

what the play was intended to convey, and half the audience will tell you he was not acting at all. Yet, in reality, he was doing vastly the more difficult thing.

Charles Hawtrey, one of the most expert light comedians on the English-speaking stage, can point a comic "aside" with a delicacy and humor and utter spontaneity quite unrivalled. It is the perfection of art. Yet we have all heard it said that Mr. Hawtrey "merely plays himself." Mr. Frank Worthing, one of the best light comedians in America, has mastered the difficult art of so playing a comic scene that he at once lets the audience into the full fun, but, in his stage character, is sublimely unconscious of anything ludicrous. As a leading man in comedy, Mr. Worthing can give measure for measure to any woman star in the country. They all know this, and his services are in constant demand from such of them as are not afraid of the comparison. Yet the public will tell you he is "always Frank Worthing," and his popular fame is infinitely less than his rare skill as an actor deserves.

As for Mr. John Drew, he could doubtless give a delightful performance of John Drew if he chose. But the fact is, he chooses to perform the characters in his plays. That he selects such characters as he can plausibly represent without make-up or an undue strain upon

his imagination is his look out. The test of his ability to act is, does he present a consistent character, and the one drawn by the playwright; does he make the points of dialogue and action intended by the author; does he bring the part and the play to life, making them real to the emotions and clear to the intelligence? There can, in most cases, be but one answer. If anybody has any doubt, let him see one of Mr. Drew's parts played by someone else. Indeed, in such a play as "Inconstant George," it should be enough to watch the other players, their awkwardness accentuated by Mr. Drew's repose, their stiffness by his life-likeness, their clumsy, ineffectual, parrot repetitions of the witty epigrams by his delicious pointing of them, so that they sound like human speech and rouse the desired mirth.

To impart interest, distinction, variety, emotional force, sincerity to a rôle which leaves everything to the actor and which, in addition, carries the message of the play, is a difficult task. It is only for the trained artists, who have a wide command of the tools of their trade. The play may be trivial, the rôle unimportant, but the art is needed, just the same. You cannot fool all of the people all of the time. If John Drew and Charles Hawtrey and Miss Ethel Barrymore and even Miss Maxine Elliott, for instance, could not act, they would long ago



have lost their vogue. Miss Marie Doro was too soon promoted to stardom, and Miss Doris Keene. Even Miss Billie Burke, who enjoyed great popularity for a time, is palling. She lacks the skill to impart life and variety to her playing. She cloy, like a dinner of dessert.

Another error in the judgment of acting results from the contempt for comedy. Of course, the comic plays prosper more, because we all instinctively prefer to laugh. But we instinctively attribute to the "emotional actress" a greater glory than to the comedienne. As a matter of fact, it is easier to be emotional than to be successfully funny, on the high plane of true comedy. The great comedians of either sex are far rarer than the great tragic players.

I once saw Miss Lena Ashwell and Miss Margaret Anglin alternate as Mrs. Dane and Lady Eastney in "Mrs. Dane's Defence." Miss Ashwell was doleful as Lady Eastney, but Miss Anglin (perhaps not so effective as Mrs. Dane) gave a brilliant comedy performance. That ranked her at once as a superior artist. The emotional scene carries its own weapons; the situation puts us in a receptive mood, and to tears and sobs on the stage we are only too ready to respond. But true comedy — not farce or horse play, but the comedy which discloses the mirth behind serious life, whether the mocking mirth of Mansfield's *Peer Gynt* or



the lovely mirth of Warfield's Music Master and Jefferson's Rip, or the brittle, icy mirth of Mrs. Fiske's Becky Sharp — is the most difficult thing to indicate on the stage. Don't put too much stock in the "great future" of the young actress who makes you weep as she goes sobbing from the room or pounds her head on the floor. Anybody can do that, even without Belasco's instruction. But watch the man or woman who can let a gleam of laughter sparkle through a performance, not by virtue of the comic situations but by virtue of a truthful sense of character and the skill to express it. He, or she, is doing the real thing.

Another common error in the judgment of acting is the failure to discriminate between a "sympathetic" and an "unsympathetic" rôle. It is perfectly safe to assume — and ethically no doubt this is as it should be — that had Jefferson's Rip seemed as big a rogue as he undoubtedly was, the public would never have acclaimed him with such enthusiasm, though Jefferson's acting might have been technically just as fine. Warfield's old Music Master owes half its popularity to its inherent sweetness, not to the sweetness nor the skill the actor puts into it. Let Warfield portray a villain with equal art, and watch the result. Mansfield's Baron Chevrial brought him great critical fame as a piece of acting, but what he acidly called "sweet

parts " brought him vastly more popularity and profit. Such is the public attitude, and coming down to ordinary plays and ordinary players, we find that an equal display of technical proficiency in two parts, one appealing to the sympathy of an audience, one going against sympathy, will in almost every case not seem equal to the public. The actor of the sympathetic rôle will carry off the lion's share of the credit. The actors themselves know this, which is why sometimes they are so impatient of criticism. That is why the poor authors, too, must make their leading characters sympathetic. The stars will not play them otherwise. Just what gives one part sympathy and takes it away from another is not always easy to say, outside of the world of conventional melodrama, where all parts are cut to traditional pattern. But, save in such remarkable exceptions as Mr. Galsworthy's " Strife," we all do take sides at the theatre, and the actors portraying the characters we are for, as it were, have a tremendous advantage in winning our favor.

We have all seen many a play containing a cad become hopelessly false because the actor playing the cad had not the skill to make the part real and vital; he could not fight against the unconscious antagonism of the audience. We have seen other actors fight against this antagonism with every weapon they possessed,

and by making the cad human, a true character, not a lay villain, enabled the play to triumph. Yet it is but rarely such players get the credit they deserve. Too often the honors go to some player in a sympathetic rôle, who very likely displayed far less technical proficiency, who conquered not by artistry but by the grace of the playwright.

After all, in the end the right judgment of acting comes down to a question of our ability, when we sit in the playhouse, to separate the part from the impersonation. This ability is none too common even among professional critics. One of William Winter's great merits was his possession of it. To judge whether an impersonation is correct necessitates a knowledge of what the part implies; to tell whether an actor is doing what he should do, it is necessary to know what he should do. In the elder days, when many plays were enacted over and over again by various competing players, it was easy, by a process of comparison, for nearly anyone to gain a conception of the possibilities of a part. The public had a pretty definite standard for the interpretation of Hamlet, Macbeth, Juliet, Viola, Malvolio, Sir Peter Teazle, and a hundred other famous rôles. So to-day, when a classic is revived at the New Theatre, comments on the acting are more intelligent (and less favorable !) than

when a new play is produced. But mostly now we witness a procession of new parts in new plays, and comparison is out of the question, save for the fortunate few who may chance to have seen the English or Continental production of an imported work. To separate the impersonation before us from the part becomes wholly a matter of imagination. Perhaps that is why so few of us do it.

What, we must ask, did the author intend this part to express? Deciding that, we act it for ourselves, before the mind's eye, and secure a comparison with the actual performance. So, though the impersonation on the stage may be quite charming and though it may please the public very much, we can conceivably state that it is not good acting. This, for the professional critic, is the only proper proceeding, though not, alas! always the popular one. In the opening act of "What Every Woman Knows," for example, Miss Maude Adams, most popular of players, acts, if not badly, at least incorrectly. She strives by every little trick at her command — and they are many — to be charming; and the part distinctly calls for a complete absence of charm. Awareness of Maggie's charm should come gradually, no less to the audience than to John Shand. A large conception of the rôle of Maggie, which saw it firmly in relation to the entire play, would bring about quite a

different impersonation in this early act, and a better one. But Miss Adams has a witchery about her which makes it doubly difficult to visualize a character which she is playing, apart from her impersonation. It is doubly difficult to convict her of error before the jury of the public.

And hers is only one of many cases. Until a rôle becomes common property and comparisons are possible, public judgment of the acting in it is likely to err, and public favorites are likely to be encouraged in the exploitation of their personal graces and idiosyncrasies at the expense of the drama. In such a semi-public institution as the New Theatre it would not be a bad idea to allow the actors, from time to time, to alternate in each other's rôles. Both the players and the public would learn much from such a proceeding.

The great actors — Mansfield, Irving, Booth, Coquelin, Garrick, and the rest — it may now be admitted, prove an exception to the rule that the character part is the easier to play. The ultimate test of great acting is something more than correctness in execution of the author's design. Great acting must bring a sense of life so sharp that the illusion is complete, that the auditor is self-forgetful, that his emotions are roused, his imagination kindled, his whole being expanded in glorious response. And it is most

often the character part which has the sharpness of outline, the bigness and strangeness, the sense of something beyond our daily average, to bring such effects about. So, if the small actor is quite sufficient to play a small character part, it is the great actor who is needed to play a great character part. The straight part has its distinct limitations. They are the limitations of the average man or woman down in the orchestra stalls. To reach those limits, contrary to accepted belief, technical skill, a fine grade of acting, is required of the player, the more because, as in playing the music of Mozart, the slightest slip is detected. But greatness lies beyond those limits, and poetry and mystery. These are furnished not by the average but the exceptional, by the character part.

Whether as Peer Gynt or Beau Brummell or Ivan the Terrible or Richard the Third, Mansfield towered before us in character parts. We remember Irving as Mathias, as Shylock, as Macbeth. We recall Coquelin as Cyrano or Tartuffe. The public is quite right in its heartier response to such impersonations, and in its feeling that the actor who walks season after season through rôles which show him only in the mild and ordinary relations of this world, almost in his proper person, is a much smaller artist, even admitting that it requires great



technical skill to impersonate so much as oneself respectably. But there is as much difference between the art required to impersonate Peer Gynt and the art required to impersonate Trotter, that amusing character part in "The Climbers," as there is difference in calibre between the two men. It is one thing to play the drunken Lord Algy, quite another to play Falstaff. If character parts are the easiest of all to play, so are they the most difficult. The measure of the character is the measure of the art.

Perhaps that is as useful as any single test we can apply to the judgment of acting. The measure of the character is the measure of the art. But to take the measure of a character presented to us for the first time, it is necessary to consider the play, dispassionately and quite apart from the impersonation, by an act of the imagination. Properly to judge acting, properly to give it emotional response, we must free ourselves first of emotion, we must judge of dramatic construction. Probably it is the inability of so many people to go behind the impersonation into the workshop that is responsible for most of the injudicious comments we hear upon the players' art.



GREAT ACTING AND THE MODERN  
DRAMA

The greatest influence on opera during the nineteenth century was exerted by Richard Wagner; the greatest influence on drama by Henrik Ibsen. Both men worked, in a sense, for the same end, the one for musical truth, for the perfect correspondence of score and text, the other for dramatic truth, for the perfect correspondence of incident and character. Opera since Wagner has continued to demand of its interpreters the finest musical talent, and a degree of dramatic skill undreamed of in the days of Handel, Mozart, or even the early Verdi. But the drama since Ibsen, on the contrary, seems to demand ever less of its interpreters, until at the present time great acting, even moving acting, is rare on our stage, and on all sides we hear the shrill complaint, "There are no great actors any more."

What is the reason for this?

Perhaps there is no single reason sufficient completely to explain the fact. But there is one reason that stands up above the others, and that, in a measure, may be said to include some of the others. It is a simple reason, too. Great actors can only be made by training in great parts; great acting can only be felt and

yielded to when its spell is put forth in great rôles. There are, practically, no great parts in modern drama. We have no great actors apparent in the new generation of players because we have no training school for them; we see no great acting because we see no great parts performed. Milton could not have been Miltonic on a lesser theme than the fall of the Angels!

The condition of opera was improved by Wagner because the base of opera is music, and that base remains through every change of emphasis or style, in text or interpretation. It is no less the base of Strauss's "Salome" (in spite of certain critics!) than of Mozart's "Magic Flute." Every step toward a closer correspondence of score and text, toward the elimination of "costume concerts" and the substitution of significant acting, was yet taken on this base of music. Ultimately, as much to-day as one hundred and fifty years ago, the appeal of opera is a musical appeal; it is to the sensuous ear, however much it may now be re-enforced by an appeal to the intelligence. Once opera required singers to interpret it; now it requires singing actors. But the song element remains the basic one.

In the drama, however, the sure base of a sensuous charm, or essentially poetic appeal, does not inevitably exist. In certain kinds of

drama it is found to a large degree; in certain other kinds it is not found at all. One of the latter kinds is, as a rule, the modern prose drama of contemporary life. Ibsen and the modern dramatists have worked to make incident and character correspond, to eliminate artificiality of plot and the "situations" which are devised arbitrarily because the actor must have his chance to shine, not because the character the actor is playing would naturally bring such situations about or is significantly affected by them. These "situations" corresponded to the arias and coloratura passages of the older operas. One of Modjeska's great performances was of Adrienne Lecouvreur, a part that was set in a drama as preposterous as any of the older operas, and, unless greatly played, as incapable of giving pleasure as is the mad scene in "Lucia" when not greatly sung. In the stern elimination of any but truthful, logical, and significant situations, in the stern suppression of "emotional scenes" for their own sake, when such scenes do not arise naturally from the character and explain the intellectual message of the play, Ibsen and the modern dramatists have forged a technique which is capable of setting forth contemporary life on the stage as truthfully and plausibly as in a novel, of teaching by inference an ethical or political or even philosophic lesson, of

making the drama seem in the eyes of thinking men and women a more serious and important thing than it has been, in English, at least, for more than a century.

And in doing this, the dramatists have done well. But they have inevitably done it at a tremendous sacrifice. The size of this sacrifice is measured by the difference between Charlotte Cushman and Maude Adams, between Edwin Booth and William Faversham. They have done it at the sacrifice of great acting.

And that is because the modern prose drama of contemporary life, in throwing over the old absurdities of plot and incident, the old pack of situations devised to put the player into a state of emotional frenzy, by placing the emphasis on the intellectual drift of the drama and its truth as a picture or lesson, has thrown over poetry as well, and great characters. Many of the old dramas had no real poetry and many of their "great" characters were not great at all, but merely went through the motions of greatness. "Virginus" is not great, and certainly is not poetry, though vanished giants of the stage, such as Macready and Forrest, achieved, we are told, astonishing emotional results in it. Richelieu is not a great character, but one so placed in a tricky melodrama that a great player can make him

seem so. Mr. Sothern in this part does not satisfy the older critics, who once saw Booth's magnificent Cardinal. But Mr. Sothern's very failings show the real weakness of the character. But there were poetic dramas in the past, and there were great characters set upon the stage and engaged in doing great deeds, even outside the works of Shakespeare. It is because the modern dramatists have found no poetry and no greatness in modern life that they have lost such a firm base as that upon which opera still rests; and, as a consequence, great acting seems to have perished for want of a soil to grow in.

Ibsen himself created two poetic plays, containing two characters of such range and depth as to deserve the adjective great — "Brand" and "Peer Gynt." But as he developed, as his plays became closer pictures and more direct commentaries on his day and generation, his characters shrank, at times almost into meanness. It requires, of course, a sure technique and very genuine talent to play Hedda Gabler. But no genius was ever so flaming as to make that character great — nor would it then be Hedda Gabler! It requires a touch of eerie poetry to play "The Lady from the Sea" — but no genius was ever so flaming as to remove from her the taint of nerves, the modern blight. The most effective of Pinero's

characters is probably Paula Tanqueray. She has been played in all European languages by the finest actresses of recent years. But, played by the best of them, Paula remains a study; pitied, perhaps, at times; observed with interest always; but always essentially small, mean, a trifle cheap. Mr. Jones has never created a great character. In his most poignant moments, as in the third act of "The Hypocrites," he gets his largeness of effect by carefully wrought suspense — a perfectly legitimate dramatic effect, but one that does not require supreme, or even great, acting to illumine. Mr. Barrie is the wisest, the most nearly poetic, the most charming of present authors writing for the English-speaking stage. And yet Mr. Barrie has never created a great character. Occasionally he has come perilously near it; "Peter Pan" trails a shadow of the things that never die. Mr. Barrie, it will be noted, least literally renders life about him, works most from the inner vision. That is why he is most nearly a poet, lays hold on the things that are most lasting, comes closest to resting his work on a firm basis of enduring charm. But, though whimsical and sound, he is surely not ample. He misses the sheer size we demand of greatness.

Of recent successful plays in America, the one which has been most popular of all, which



has given the widest scope for acting of a purely virtuoso sort and for emotional response from an audience, is "The Music Master." And that play is, curiously, the least modern in content, the most old-fashioned and far-away from the new spirit in drama. It is a "one part" play; it is a series of arias and emotional coloratura passages for David Warfield. Yet it has swept the entire country, by virtue of just that fact — because it does give an opportunity for ample acting, which is amply met by the player. It has shown that we do not want acting to be a lost art. The "Witching Hour," however, has no great part, hence no opportunity for ample acting; it succeeds by its intellectual message. "The Lion and the Mouse" had no great part; it succeeded because of its political drift. "The Great Divide" and the same author's new play, "The Faith Healer," tremble on the verge of poetry if not greatness. To suggest convincingly the soul struggle of the former play surely requires a capacity for poetry in the players, and must react to their development. To suggest the inner fire and force of "The Faith Healer" does surely require a touch of greatness of the actor essaying the rôle. The character is no mere Kentucky gambler of "The Witching Hour": he is a Savonarola of the Plains. But Mr. Moody, the author of



these plays, has previously been known as a poet, and though now working in prose, obviously he is working more from an inner vision than a photographer's sense.

Farce and frivolity the stage has always had, and always will. We need not consider that now. Some of our vanished giants appeared in rubbish. William Warren played parts in his day which George M. Cohan would have blushed to devise, and Garrick was not always great. But a careful consideration of the seriously inclined plays of the present generation in America or elsewhere, cannot fail to show that what we have gained over the past in truthful reflection on the stage of actual life about us we have lost in the majesty of the characters depicted, in the depth and intensity of the emotions portrayed. And consequently our players have lost the force and sweep and power the older actors were obliged to develop to play the older parts. Charlotte Cushman's "Lady Macbeth" had an emotional appeal and an ample sweep of imagination incomparably greater than Maude Adams's "Lady Babbie," because it was a successful embodiment of a vastly greater rôle. But it would not have been successful had Miss Cushman been trained in no wider nor deeper range of parts than Miss Adams has. Salvini's performance in "La Morte Civile" was tremen-

dous in its overpowering emotional effect. The audiences used to gasp and sob. But if he, like David Warfield, had played in only four dramas in his entire career, or, like scores of promising actors of to-day, had never had a chance to play a big part in his life — a part with the weight of poetry behind it and varied and ample emotional expression — Salvini would never have torn the breasts of his audiences as he did. Indeed, it will be noted that E. H. Sothorn did not attempt “Dundreary” till he had played “Hamlet.” Even for sustained comedy a severe training is required. And it will be noted that most of the players on our stage to-day who possess power and amplitude — Miss Marlowe, Mrs. Fiske, Otis Skinner, for example — have had long training in large parts, beginning in “the old school.”

But all this does not mean that progress consists in going backward. It does not mean that the way for a modern actor to demonstrate his greatness is to play Virginius, or for an actress is to play Adrienne. It does not mean that the way for a modern playwright to create great opportunities for the players is to devise elaborate emotional arias for them, nor that the way for him to be poetic is necessarily to twist good honest prose back end foremost into blank verse. That would

mean to lose all that the drama has toilsfully gained; that would be reversion, not progress.

Some of the modern emphasis in stage entertainment on the intellectual message of the play rather than the emotional effects of the actors, is doubtless ephemeral, a passing fashion. The success of "The Music Master" shows that. But much of it is real and lasting, and a great gain. Were the choice between "King Lear" and, let us say, "The Witching Hour," who would hesitate to choose? But it is n't. Shakespeare does not "abide our question." He is for all time, for all ages, all fashions, like Sophocles and Molière. Rather is the choice between "Virginus," or "The Iron Chest," or "Adrienne Lecouvreur," or "Caste," and "The Witching Hour." And shall we hesitate? We must keep fast hold on our truthful drama of contemporary life, with its intellectual drift, its "criticism of life," its message to the head as well as the emotions. Nobody will care a hundred years hence what we thought about old Rome or lands of mythical romance. But what we thought about the problems of the hour will be history.

Progress will come, the restoration of great acting and of poetry will come, when our modern dramatists discover greatness and poetry in contemporary life, when the repre-

sensation of great emotions is demanded of the actors not as a "stunt" in an unimportant or false story, but as a logical outcome of an important and truthful story, as the natural expression of great men and women. Nobody cares much to-day — and who can be blamed? — about the emotions of old Virginius and his impossible offspring; nor can anybody raise a tear for Adrienne Lecouvreur in her paste-board world. But some of us could care very much about the emotions of a great American in the face of a great modern crisis. We hear of tremendous, fabulous fortunes, for example, and we fancy the men who amassed these fortunes must be men of power, of a certain kind of greatness, if not the finest kind, if not of moral greatness. Yet we see one of them depicted in "The Lion and the Mouse," with nothing great about him. The author has failed to grasp his opportunity. There was a touch of sinister greatness, possibly, about the copper king, Samson, in M. Bernstein's play, but in America we saw the character entrusted to an actor who had never in his life played a part that fitted him for the representation of greatness, and the effect was, for us, quite lost.

Kipling sighed for a man "like Bobbie Burns, to sing the song o' steam." We may well sigh for a dramatist to write the play of

steam, or of electricity, or Wall Street, or Socialism, or Labor Unions, or the increased cost of living. Swinburne died recently, and we mourned the last of the poets. Irving and Coquelin died, and we mourned the passing of the actors. But somehow the rest of us go ahead thinking the same old thoughts, and feeling the same old thrilling pangs, and doing, now and then, the same old brave, foolish, ideal deeds. We are still the raw material of drama. And there is no tariff.

In their preoccupation with modern people and modern problems, then, a preoccupation inevitably conditioned by the change in dramatic standards, if they would once again fertilize the soil for great acting and acting touched with the glow of poetry, the dramatists must find great modern people to depict, set them great problems to wrestle with, and endow their lives with an inner gleam of charm and beauty. It is not enough for our actors to return to "the classic repertoire." A good deal of that repertoire the new generation does not want. And to insist that our actors return to it for their training is surely to crush out present and future playwrights, to block the wheels of progress. Great acting in the future must be developed by the plays of the future. And already there are hints that such acting may be so developed. There is some-

thing epic about "Magda." There was nothing small about Mrs. Fiske's "Tess." Mr. Moody has stirred the breath of poetry on our stage and out of the ample places brought an ample man. What our stage needs is playwrights of greater and nobler imagination. What our actors need is a chance.

### A PLEA FOR OPERETTA

It is not an accident that there is no grand opera in English — that is, opera written and composed by men who speak the English language, not grand opera translated into the English tongue. And it is not an accident that one of the greatest composers of operetta in the world, Sir Arthur Sullivan, was an Englishman (though of Irish birth) setting to music the inimitable English librettos of Gilbert, and that the chief composer in America to-day who writes for the stage, Victor Herbert, writes operettas. Grand opera, so largely and expensively produced in New York and also in other American cities, is composed by foreigners to accompany foreign librettos, conducted by foreigners, and in a large measure sung by foreigners. It is not native to us nor to England; it thrives on its lavish scale largely by virtue of its



social aspect; for, great as our acquired interest is in grand opera, and more especially in certain grand opera singers, it could not be supported in its present magnificence for six weeks without the social backing. Meanwhile, without any social backing whatever, operettas of merit, when we get them, and musical comedies always, pursue their way in the commercial theatre, despised oftentimes by the critics and those musically learned, but far more a part and parcel of our amusement life, reflecting far more our tastes and habits, than do the Metropolitan Opera House programs and the fare until recently afforded at Mr. Hammerstein's.

This is not an accident. It is an indication of racial traits. It should teach us that the cultivation of operetta as an art and a popular force in our community ought not to be left to Vienna, that it should be more seriously regarded here, more carefully cultivated, more worthily performed. The creation of one American operetta like Gilbert's and Sullivan's "Patience," would be worth a dozen importations of "Madame Butterflies" and "Tosca" and "Salomes." The manager who should produce it would deserve far more credit, and he would probably gain no less a reward.

Grand opera is a natural speech with certain races—as natural as it is possible for



opera to be, which is an art based essentially on an unreality, the hypothesis that men and women sing their thoughts and feelings. This is notably the case with the Italians, in whose grand operas far more than in their lighter pieces the passions, and even the folk-tunes, of the people find expression. It is true, also, of the Russians, in whose serious music of all kinds the folk-tune croons unceasingly. A German grand opera like "Der Freischütz" of Weber is national music, in a true sense. A Bohemian opera like "The Bartered Bride" rises from the native song and dance with delightful spontaneity. The French, always master craftsmen, have produced both light and serious opera, and both excellently well done; and neither, perhaps, quite spontaneous. The *opéra bouffe* of Offenbach, Lecocq, and Audran followed, after all, the fairly formal rules of a "school," and in the serious operas of Massenet, just now so popular in New York, correctness is more noticeable than inspiration.

But England and Austria have found their musical expression on the stage almost exclusively in operettas. Johann Strauss, the "waltz king," was also king of operetta; then there was Suppé, of "Boccaccio" and "Poet and Peasant," and but lately we have heard the old, heady rhythms again, caught the old wine and sparkle of Viennese life, in

"The Merry Widow" of Lehar and "The Chocolate Soldier" of Oscar Strauss, now deservedly popular on our American stage, even if its libretto is a travesty of Shaw's "Arms and the Man." These pieces from Vienna, musically based on the waltz, are as truly national as it is possible for stage music to be — they are as national as they are delightful, and because they are so sincere their tunes endure. "Die Fledermaus" of Johann Strauss is as fresh to-day as it ever was — vastly fresher than that other Strauss's "Salome" will be fifty years hence.

In England the list of great composers is less than the lists of other nations. But England has an honorable musical history, and once was far in advance of the Continental world in musical knowledge and skill. John of Forneste's famous six-part glee, "Sumer is a-cumin in," composed in 1230, was far beyond anything on the Continent. In Elizabeth's time music was a part of the education of every English gentleman, the musician was held in high regard, and the English ballads of that day reached a high point of perfection. Some of them have never, for fresh simplicity and for sheer magic of melody, been excelled in any land at any time. We still sing "Drink to Me only with Thine Eyes," and dozens more. Then, due in part to the influence of

the French ballet, in part to Italian musical influence, came the English masques. But, as Jonson and Milton surpassed the French ballet builders, the English musicians went far beyond mere Italian finish and correctness. The last of the seventeenth-century composers and the greatest English composer, perhaps, yet born, was Henry Purcell. Though opera, as we understand it, was then in its infancy, he developed the ballad and the masque till he wrote operas, such as "King Arthur" and "Dido and Æneas," which contained passages of great dramatic sincerity, beauty, and power. But with the eighteenth century English music declined. The nation still demanded its native musical expression — nations always will. This was supplied by piecing together on a thread of spoken plot the popular ballads, as in the case of "The Beggar's Opera," with a text by Gay. English music, in the words of Sir Arthur Sullivan, "was thrown into the hands of the illustrious foreigners, Händel, Haydn, Spohr, Mendelssohn (so long the favorite composers of the English) and of the Italian opera which exclusively occupied the attention of the fashionable classes, and like the great car of Juggernaut overrode and crushed all efforts made on behalf of native music."

It was significant that the rebirth of Eng-

lish music, almost two centuries after the death of Purcell, came along the lines in which it had excelled in the past — in church music on the one hand, of which Sir Edward Elgar is the present leading composer, and in popular music on the other hand; not, to be sure, in ballads, but in operetta (which is far nearer to masque than grand opera is, and demands, like the masque, a native text), where the songs none the less had the ballad ring and the appeal was not exotic, not to any fashionable classes, but to everybody, to the sane, merrymaking spirit of the people. This side of the musical rebirth was accomplished by the operettas of Gilbert and Sullivan. They occupy in the history of British music as important a place as the grand operas occupy in the musical history of Italy. They show the natural drift of the Anglo-Saxon temperament when it is applied to musical composition for the stage.

Sullivan, of course, did not invent his form. His first venture, "Cox and Box," was directly suggested and inspired by Offenbach. But he consciously wrought into his work the spirit of old English music — witness the song of the centurion in the second act of "Iolanthe" — and he set to music English librettos, understandable and of interest to contemporary Englishmen, happy and sane and blithe. These

operettas raged over America as they raged over England. For every person who heard and enjoyed grand opera in a foreign tongue, ten at least heard and enjoyed "Pinafore" and "Patience" and "The Mikado." Now, it is easy to say that those operettas were not so "deep" as grand opera, nor so "lofty." But just what does that mean? They were musically just as sound, certainly. They had the same tonic effect on musical taste. They did not stir the spectator as does "Don Giovanni," or Verdi's "Otello." But can anyone in honesty say that they did not possess by their gay, honest humor a greater sincerity than "Lucia di Lammermoor," or Massenet's "Herodiade" or the wearisome bombasts of Meyerbeer, or, yes, even this! the Teutonic outpourings of Wagner? And they reached in their day and interested and influenced a vastly greater number of people. They were native and near. They spoke the people's speech. They were our own. It seems absurd to suggest that they need any defense. Yet, in the eyes of a good many people to-day, who rush madly to hear Italian grand opera, operetta does need defense. It is still looked down upon, despised.

Much of it, of course, is despicable from any careful, artistic standpoint, for in lieu of real operetta our people, hungry for native, under-

standable and spontaneous stage entertainment with the accompaniment of music and rhythm, demand what we call musical comedy. The fact that at least one-third of the theatrical productions made in New York each season are musical comedies, however, does not prove that the taste of the people is vicious. Rather it proves what a real craving exists for the pleasant ministrations of music and rhythm, and also what a mighty influence the composers and librettists of operettas might exert. The enormous popularity of the Gilbert and Sullivan productions showed that the better the book and the better the music, provided it was real operetta music, blithe and fluent, the greater the patronage. The influence of "Patience" proved, indeed, how potent operetta may be as a weapon of satire. In later years the success of George Ade's "The Sultan of Sulu," though accompanied by music of little charm or significance, proved how keen a desire there really is for librettos which bite, which have wit and point, and make ironic comment on the affairs of the hour. Still more recently the whirlwind triumph of "The Merry Widow" showed that the interest in Sullivan was not a flash in the pan, that music with real melody and charm and grace is at all times more desired than the musical monstrosities of a G. M. Cohan. Musical comedy,



as we call it, exists because the instinctive popular demand of the Anglo-Saxon public is not for grand opera — which is an exotic with us — but for appropriately blithe and sparkling music wedded to a comic or satirical text. Just as the “ballad operas” existed alongside of the imported music in England in 1730, so to-day in New York, side by side with German, French and Italian grand opera in two huge opera houses, half a dozen musical comedies constantly flourish, new ones replacing the old incessantly.

And they would exist just the same if the entire public were as musically “educated” as the most eloquent music critic desires. A people will follow their natural bent, in stage entertainments as elsewhere. They will insist on wanting what they want when they want it. No horseshoe of diamonds or fashion, no golden voiced Caruso, no blare and sob of a mighty orchestra, can compensate for the pleasure which comes from a complete understanding of the text, from a sympathy with the national point of view of the play, from the tang of reality about it, the fun and the sparkle and the sting. The rhythmic sense and the love of melody, which are part of even our Anglo-Saxon natures, demand satisfaction in the theatre. But they demand satisfaction through natural channels. Grand opera is not



such a channel. There is no grand opera which is not exotic to English-speaking people. Operetta is such a channel. And when we cannot get the best, we take second or third rate musical plays rather than none at all.

The lesson of all this is that if the heedless patrons of musical comedy need a more developed musical taste, so do the patrons of grand opera and the countless symphony concerts. It is only an undeveloped musical taste which can sneer at Sullivan, or the composer of "The Merry Widow," or Strauss of "The Chocolate Soldier," or Victor Herbert of "Babes in Toyland" and "The Red Mill." To the credit of that abused and despised creature, the American theatre-goer, even the Tired Business Man, be it said they are not the ones who sneer! When the public can get a Sullivan or a Strauss or a Victor Herbert, time and again it has been proved that the public prefers these real musicians to the tune-carpenters. What has put the composition of musical comedy in England and America so largely into the hands of the mere tune-carpenters, the one-fingered composers of rag-time, is the attitude of the more musically educated classes, the worshipers of foreign grand opera, the people who think a dull symphony, just because it is a symphony, is by some mystic law thereby infinitely better music

than the most inspired waltz or such a passage of sly musical delineation and captivating melody as the mock description of *Nanki Poo's* death in "The Mikado" or the letter song in "The Chocolate Soldier." This attitude has turned our native musicians away from what might be a natural expression of their talents and often caused them to break their hearts over unproduced grand operas or unappreciated symphonies, when they might be doing a vastly more useful work setting to appropriate rhythm and melody the American Sense of Humor.

For, after all, if grand opera is an exotic to us, this is in no small part due, surely, to our sense of humor. The Saxon imagination has a hard wall of reality about it, which accounts for our emotional reticence. It cannot quite follow grand opera, because for stage expression in concrete terms of the more serious passions it demands the realism of pure drama. We love — especially our women folks — to fancy we are wallowing in emotional responsiveness to those sobbing fiddles and sighing voices. But, really, our heads are always a little in the way of our hearts. It is never for us quite natural and convincing. In operetta, however, our heads consent to keep out of the way. Here our love of rhythm and melody can be satisfied to the full and we do

not take our pleasures sadly but gayly, while the incidents of the hour are lightly touched upon by the text. And to the pleasure of music is added the pleasure of something native, something peculiarly our own, the pleasure, too, of seeing ourselves and others made fun of.

Gilbert was an ideal librettist not only because he was a skilled comic dramatist and a brilliant satirist, as in "Pinafore," but because in his lyric passages he possessed a verbal felicity and varied rhythmic scheme which were of incalculable aid to the composer. Sullivan himself has told how he always chose the rhythm of a passage before he composed the melody, and insisted on the importance of rhythm. Read, if you have the courage, the lyrics in any Broadway musical comedy, and see if you can fancy even Mozart getting out of them any but the most hackneyed rhythms. This is but one indication of the harm that has been done by the general contempt cast upon musical comedy by the musically "enlightened." Musical comedy cannot at present enlist the services of musical composers powerful and intelligent enough to insist upon better lyrics and closer coöperation between composer and librettist, nor upon librettists intelligent enough, as a rule, to train themselves in varied versification. Again and again Victor Herbert's

scores have suffered from the lack of coöperation and from the poverty of inspiration in the material he was called to set to music.

But this could be altered by the right coöperation of the right men, and the public which now flocks to second-rate pieces, because it must have some musical comedies, would flock in even greater numbers to native operettas, even as it flocked to "Pinafore" and "Robin Hood" and "The Merry Widow." Clyde Fitch, who, in his lighter plays, handled contemporary life with extraordinary felicity, might conceivably have written librettos of great charm and wit had the medium seemed to him more dignified and could he have been assured the coöperation of a first-rate composer. Like the "ballad opera" of 1730, our musical comedies of to-day are popular songs strung on dialogue—only now the songs are not "Sally in Our Alley" and "Drink to Me only with Thine Eyes," but "I Love My Wife, but oh You Kid!" and "Bill Simmons." Are these songs the best ballads our native composers can write? Far from it! One can hardly conceive the exquisite, melancholy genius of MacDowell in the popular theatre. But we have a score, at least, of song writers in America who could, in coöperation with a dramatist of wit and fancy, and we possess them, too! put forth operettas of musical dis-

tion, popular appeal and substantial charm. What is needed to bring this about is not a greater education of the people, but a more catholic education of the musically elect, so that they shall realize the true importance of operetta and musical comedy, its national significance, and no longer sneer at the composer who writes it.

The drama in recent years in America has been creeping closer to contemporary life, till to-day we have a dozen native writers for the stage who know their trade and can depend on a public. We no longer go to Europe for the bulk of our plays. We have the material and the workmen to create native librettos. Musically, also, America has made vast strides in recent years, and now our native composers are no longer scorned at home and are no longer, either, without technical skill to match their aspirations. Why should not these two, playwrights and composers, join forces to create real musical stage works in the native idiom — which is operetta or musical comedy — that would appeal to all classes, widen the appreciation of good music, give substantial pleasure, and help to increase the charm and dignity of the American stage? Grand opera is foreign, and we apparently want to keep it so. We will not submit to hearing it translated into English, let alone listening to it when it is com-

posed by men of our race. Our musicians are doing themselves and us no good when they strain after this exotic fruit and leave the native garden just without their door unhusbanded. The book and score of an American "Patience" would do more for music in America than a wilderness of grand operatic attempts, because such a work would be native and natural, the spontaneous expression of our people.

## THE DRAMATIST AS MAN OF LETTERS

### THE CASE OF CLYDE FITCH

To take Clyde Fitch seriously always surprised many serious people. To take the theatre seriously always surprises many serious people, for that matter — the theatre, that is, not of the printed page, not of the so-called "literary drama," but the actual playhouse, where farces and musical comedies, vaudeville and moving pictures, trivialities of all sorts, jostle with Shakespeare and Ibsen in the long effort to amuse. Now, Clyde Fitch was a man of that actual playhouse; his plays, though several of them have found their way into type, were designed for the footlights with no thought of type in mind. They were almost



as much "produced" as written, for Mr. Fitch was his own alert stage manager and shaped his pieces in rehearsal. They were, most of them, frankly wrought to amuse, to entertain an audience in the playhouse, to bring the immediate returns of popularity and patronage. They were neither conceived nor considered as literature in the conventional sense. Mr. Fitch was perfectly willing to be a dramatic tailor, to cut a part to the measure of a star, to adapt from the French or German, to "dramatize" novels. Mostly, he may fairly be said to have been concerned not so much with weaving a fabric as cutting a garment; mostly he wrought, it seemed to his critics, not so much from a central idea, from an impulse of self-expression, as from a purely theatrical impulse to "shape up" an entertaining story. He belonged to Broadway, not the library or the class room. How, then, shall he be considered seriously, in the formal sense, and his work regarded as of literary importance?

It cannot be so regarded unless the critic is willing to make certain concessions. But neither can the stage work of men much more highly esteemed in literary circles than Clyde Fitch, the work, even, of some acknowledged masters of literary form. "Peter Pan," by J. M. Barrie, would make a poor showing in print. Yet is it less worthy work than "The



Little White Bird," his prose fantasy between covers, out of which it grew? A literary critic recently wrote of John Galsworthy's "Plays":

"While we are all aware that plays frequently get themselves printed in book form, we have very generally come to regard this as a mysterious and purely conventional activity of the publishers. But — and the fact is of some moment — Mr. Galsworthy's plays are actually readable. They are not of the stage, stagey. They have literary form, fictional interest, and human appeal. . . . It would almost seem as though Mr. Galsworthy had rediscovered the underground passage between literature and the stage."

This paragraph is more or less typical of the literary critic's attitude toward the drama regarded as literature. It shows clearly the concession which must be made, not only in the case of Mr. Fitch's work, but in that of many another dramatist. The critic applies to the printed play the same tests he applies to the novel or story, and finds "the underground passage between literature and the stage" only when the dialogue is sufficiently embellished, the characters reduced to cold type sufficiently plausible, the situations sufficiently interesting or poignant, robbed of the living pulse of interpretation by actors and actresses. Now, the novel or story is written to be read, and what

it does in type is all it can do. The drama is not even written; it is constructed. And it is constructed to be acted in a theatre by living men and women, with illusive scenery, artificial lights manipulated at will, the tang of actuality about it, and the mood of it created for the spectator by a thousand aids which have no connection with the printed page, which can and do escape the reckoning of the literary critic. Its characters, impersonated by good actors, may conceivably say things of stinging humor or pathos which in cold type will look trivial and mean. Its situations, which may conceivably seem stiff and formal on the printed page, by their very formality may rise steadily to a thrilling climax in the theatre, where the interest of the audience is held by the eye and the ear and led on from one moment to the next, step by step, so that a formal, mathematical precision of incident is frequently an aid, not a blemish.

Unless it is drama written frankly for literary effect, as modern blank verse drama always is, its dialogue is the more effective the closer it approximates the inelegant speech of daily life, the closer it fits the characters who speak it, not as we visualize and exalt them in type but as they walk before us in concrete form. No small part of the charm, the literary distinction of Maurice Hewlett's "Open Coun-

try," is in the rhapsodic outpourings of Senhouse, which, on the printed page, carry you irresistibly along. But in an acted drama one dreads to think of their fate, unless they were condensed, made more colloquial, robbed, in short, of what is now their grace of style. Again, addressed as the drama is so much to the eye, its finest passages are often impossible of reproduction in type. Can you get into print the final moments of "Shore Acres," when old Nat Berry, played so beautifully by James A. Herne, climbs the stairs with his candle, and then the empty kitchen glows silently in the fire-light, like a benediction, before the curtain glides down? Can you reproduce the scene when Barbara Frietchie climbs the stairs in Mr. Fitch's play? Can you, indeed, reproduce a thousand and one poignant dramatic situations, carefully planned by the dramatist, when pantomime and silence get the mood and meaning across the footlights?

It is obvious, then, that what is most effective in the theatre need not be most effective in type, and what is the literature of the proscenium frame need not be the literature of the printed page. That a great many fine dramas are literature, in the formal sense, when printed — Sophocles, Shakespeare, Molière, Sheridan, Ibsen — does not prove that a great many fine dramas are not. At best, it

proves, perhaps, that the finest dramas transcend the theatre. And even they are never quite satisfactory till played, never quite the same things, at any rate. For ordinary purposes, what is or is not literature in drama should in fairness be determined by the play's effectiveness and truth in actual presentation on the stage. The concession which the critic must make is this — he must learn to visualize the printed play as he reads, and judge it as literature by its stage value. He must understand that it is but the skeleton he has before him. To do this is difficult, but not impossible, the more as most printed plays have been acted. The critic of music would not dream of judging a symphony by the printed score, unless he had the technical ability to read it into sound.

If we apply this test to the work of Clyde Fitch it is impossible to deny it a place, and an important place, in the stage literature of America. His plays were never concerned with large personages nor profound passions. His comments on the pageant of social life which he depicted were never deep. His pre-occupation with the idea of successful "entertainment" was a blemish on much of his work. Nevertheless, that work at its best caught truthfully the surface of the life depicted and occasionally, with a kind of smiling irony,

plunged down below the crust; it was made fascinating by a boundless observation and individual by the touches of its author's sprightly fancy. Never stirring profoundly the beholder, and not infrequently annoying him by its petty devices of villainy to bring a situation about, it was yet work which gave much pleasure at the moment, was freshly and vitally contemporaneous, and has counted steadily as influence in the American theatre. The stage literature of to-day in this country is more truthful, more carefully observed, closer to life and more consistently a comment upon it (for merely to observe truthfully is to comment) than it was before Mr. Fitch began to write. In this development his work played a large and important part. It could not have done so had it not been truthful work, had it not been dramatic literature. And one is tempted to add it could not have done so had it been written with the printed page in mind. It is the men of the theatre who do its real work.

That the better of Mr. Fitch's plays were a comment upon life, a truthful comment, and hence literature, although in the main they were designed for purposes of theatrical entertainment, was due to the fact that his instinctive respect for the theatre was greater than that of the mere theatrical artificer on the one hand — Sardou, for instance, or per-

haps Henri Bernstein or W. Somerset Maugham — and greater, on the other hand, than that of the usual “literary dramatist,” self-styled, whom Mr. Fitch probably held in considerable contempt. His respect for the theatre was so great that he saw men and women in the world about him, heard conversations in his daily rambles, observed incidents and characters, in the light of possible stage material. It was not in him to divorce this daily reality from the theatre. If it was good enough for life, it was not too good for the drama nor too mean. This, when you come to think of it, is a high respect. And his respect for the theatre, also, was such that his wish was to appeal to its habitual audiences, to catch their ear and win their favor. For the dramatic cults, the associated “high brows,” as they are known on Broadway, he cared not at all. That, at bottom, the desire for pecuniary gain had anything to do with this, all who knew Mr. Fitch can stoutly deny. It was an instinct with him. It led him, no doubt, into excesses of caricature or “comic relief” which marred even his best plays, as “The Truth.” But, on the other hand, it kept his work immediately and practically effective and enabled him to exert his influence along the only lines that were for him potential. Because he respected the actual theatre too



much to give it less than reality, so far as he could, and because he respected the actual theatre too much to withdraw contemptuously from its verdicts, he made the actual theatre a better place within his own too brief lifetime, he helped to increase critical respect for it, and to refine popular appreciation.

When Mr. Fitch began to get a hearing in the theatre, in 1890, he was but four years out of Amherst College. He came on with the new generation who had been born too late for the blank verse heroics of the Victorian era or its silly farces, sentimentalities, and endless adaptations from the French of the school of Scribe. It was incumbent upon the newer dramatists to bend the prose drama into either a convincing substitute for poetical heroics and romance, or a sufficiently truthful picture of men and manners to answer an intellectual need. Unconsciously, perhaps, they chose the latter course. Silly plays, tawdry arrangements of artificial situations and shopworn theatrical "passions" still flourished — and still flourish. Doubtless they always will. But at the time Mr. Fitch began to write, in Germany, France, England and even in America, there were signs of better things. Ibsen's "Ghosts" was produced in Berlin at the Freie Bühne in 1889, at the Théâtre Libre in Paris in 1890, by the Independent Theatre in London



in 1891, and at the Berkeley Lyceum in New York in 1894. Ibsen's "A Doll's House" was first played in England, however, in 1889. This performance almost immediately followed the production of Pinero's "The Profligate," his first serious drama. Ibsen's effect thereafter on Jones and Pinero was considerable, even if they had got on the track of what Mr. Jones sententiously called "the great realities of modern life" before the Norwegian was heard in English. What William Archer calls "a declaration of independence from French adaptations" ensued in Great Britain. In America, more remote from the whirlpool of controversy, the declaration of independence was slower in coming. But looking back over the last decade of the nineteenth century, we remember sharply James A. Herne's realistic dramas, "Shore Acres," "Sag Harbor," and "Griffith Davenport," the Civil War melodramas of Bronson Howard, Belasco, and Gillette, the "state" plays of Augustus Thomas, and Clyde Fitch's "Nathan Hale" and "Barbara Frietchie." These stand out as vividly national against the Zenda romances then raging. They did seriously and more or less consciously what Harrigan and Hart and Charles Hoyt were doing unconsciously and farcically — using American material, truthfully observed, for purposes of drama.

But so far only one of these men, James A. Herne, had gone much beyond obvious material. Probably he alone was fully conscious of the stream of tendency which he was alike guiding and guided by. Mr. Herne died, Mr. Howard ceased to write, Mr. Gillette faded into a more or less innocuous adapter of foreign work. Mr. Thomas has only in the past few years come to a full realization of what the drama means to him. But Clyde Fitch, man of the theatre though he was, cutter of garments to the order of any star, adapter and collaborator when the call came, in his numerically huge output continued to furnish a steady proportion of American dramas, truthfully observed, with an increasing purpose behind them and an increasing wealth of significant and satirical detail. His example did more than any other single influence in the American Theatre to keep the on-coming dramatists lined up to the new standard and the new ideal. His name is writ large as a signer of the American drama's declaration of independence.

In the score of years during which he wrote for the stage, Mr. Fitch produced thirty-three original plays, counting as two plays each shorter dramas later rewritten, and twenty-three "dramatizations" of novels or adaptations of foreign works. He left behind at his

death three additional original manuscripts and two adaptations. It has been for years the supposition that if he had written less he would have written better. Probably, however, this is not true. He had a "bottled lightning" mind and little power of reflection. Moreover, invention, the greatest difficulty of play writing, was easy for him, the labor of constructing a plot and situations less than for most men. He wrote as his nature directed; and it is rather foolish to quarrel with any artist's method of composition. The process of adapting a play, though Mr. Fitch, as in "Girls," for instance, often transformed the original into a new thing by his wealth of characteristic detail, is not a severe mental strain. Thirty-six original plays in twenty years of ardent and unceasing toil is not, perhaps, an inordinate number, certainly not a record number. Shakespeare, indeed, wrote almost as many.

And of these original plays all but one of them written since 1900 (and that one, "The Toast of the Town," was made over from an earlier piece) dealt with American subjects, almost all with contemporary American subjects, often in a fresh, vivid, and interesting manner. With increasing sureness the majority of them gained their chief interest not from the old tricks of plot nor the old virtuosity of

the actors, so common on our stage a generation before, but from the essential truth of their observation of contemporaneous life and manners.

In 1901 Miss Amelia Bingham produced "The Climbers," after nearly every manager in New York had rejected it because, they said, "the public would never stand for the funeral stuff in the first act." How little the managers understood what was coming to be vital in drama was shown by the result. The public "stood for" the first act, quite literally, three deep behind the last row of seats, because they recognized its deliciously ironic observation. A shallow social climber and her daughters, in funeral mourning for a father just lost, bargained with two other women for the sale of their now useless wardrobes. The scene was wickedly acid, for all its humor, and written with such observation of feminine trickery and the manners of a certain class of society that it was irresistible. The play went on to develop the tragedy of a Wall Street plunger and his socially aspiring family — a sordid tragedy of rather sordid and trivial people. But it was theatrically effective and proved anew that a popular play could be made without going back of yesterday nor beyond New York for the material. And by the salient satire of its surface details it showed

how valuable a thing for the dramatist is the observant eye — the eye which is not shut as soon as the author quits the playhouse but is then most open, gathering material not from the musty store-room of stage tradition but from the streets and drawing-rooms.

In "Barbara Frietchie," produced by Miss Marlowe in 1899 with great success, Mr. Fitch had shown in the minor detail of stage setting what can be achieved by good taste, solidity and truthfulness of setting, how in the contemporary prose drama sharply framed by a proscenium arch the illusion can be heightened by attention to the "production." Mr. Belasco, among others, was already working on the same tack. But Mr. Belasco's attention to the "production" sometimes results in a swamping of more essential things. With Mr. Fitch the setting was always one detail of a scheme of realism which reached as far as his plots, and only there broke down. In "Captain Jinks of the Horse Marines" (played by Miss Ethel Barrymore in 1901) not only the stage replica of the old Hotel Brevoort in New York during its palmy days and the enormous skirts worn by the ladies gave the proper atmosphere, but the rehearsal of the old-fashioned ballet dance, the old ballet master himself, the pervading sense of a smaller New York of the early 70's gone mad over a

pretty singer, after the fashion of our fathers, created an illusion historically truthful.

In "The Stubbornness of Geraldine" (written for Miss Mary Mannering in 1902) not only was the illusion of a pitching steamer created by the stage carpenter — a simple trick of no importance — but the scene on the deck was filled with such countless delightful strokes of observation, both of character and incident, that no printed sketch of an ocean voyage could have caught so vividly its humors. A gentle ridicule pervaded this scene, but ridicule which resided entirely in the aptness of the characters themselves and of what they did. "The Girl with the Green Eyes" (produced by Mrs. Bloodgood in 1902) was a play of more serious mettle. Here Mr. Fitch set earnestly to work at last to study a character. But he could not forego his detail, he could not keep out of his play those strokes of observation. That was one of his weaknesses; he abused his virtues by overworking them. The scene showing the Cook's Tourists before the Apollo Belvidere was capital fun, but hardly belonged in this serious drama of jealousy any more than did the young man who was incessantly taking pills.

"Her Own Way" and "Her Great Match," written in 1903 and 1905 for Miss Maxine Elliott (cut to order, as it were), on the other



hand justified the "Fitchian detail" — already this close and sprightly observation of the surface of life had come to be accepted as a sort of standard. One was willing to pause and watch the minor characters and the intimate details of the story which were so vivid a part of the charm. In "Glad of It" (a failure) Mr. Fitch endeavored to dramatize a department store, which was at least daring. In "Girls," an adaptation from the German (1908), he shaped the original so much into his own manner that it became practically his play; and here his vivid observation of surface detail was seen at its best. The life of three bachelor girls in a New York flat — the rattling of water in the steam radiator, the singing of a "vocalist" across the air-shaft, the washing of handkerchiefs in a bowl, later spread to dry on the window-pane, the suppers of *éclairs* and chocolate, the rows with the janitor — that was its substance, and that was caught with such smiling assurance, such deft truth, that it had the tang of actuality which the story of the play quite missed, and, slight and unimportant as the little piece was it made you dissatisfied with many a more ambitious drama, dissatisfied because the more ambitious drama lacked this surface reality, this sense of scenes and persons lifted out of life and set down upon the stage. A truthful



surface texture, indeed, was with Mr. Fitch a matter of style, and almost as much an instinct as personal cleanliness.

It is no criticism of his truth as an artist to say that his people, even in the most ambitious of his plays, were generally small people, engaged in somewhat trivial affairs and moving in a shallow and trivial social world. So long as Mr. Fitch remained true to the types he chose to depict, and among whom, it must be confessed, he seemed to move with the most pleasure, his art might be limited, but it could not be called false. He set out deliberately to study these types in serious drama at least twice, to put aside except for the mere purposes of background the adroit surface detail, the array of amusing minor personages, the satirical or comic little interludes which he knew so well how to transfer from the avenue to the stage, and to track down the deeper spiritual truths of character. These plays were "The Girl with the Green Eyes" and "The Truth." In both of them he failed of complete success. In both of them he did demonstrate that he was not fully an artist, not, however, because he chose trivial types — that was his right — but because he could not remain consistently true to his task of tracking them down.

The trouble in "The Girl with the Green

Eyes " was the plot, the chain of circumstances which revealed the character of Jinny, the jealous wife. Those circumstances were largely external to her character, arbitrary and artificial. Jinny remains true to herself in this play, to be sure, but it is not the fate of most of us to have unmitigated cads for younger brothers, as Jinny had, and it is only on the stage, perhaps, that a husband would risk his domestic happiness and the love of his wife by concealing the truth about her abominable brother under the mistaken notion that his "honor" compelled him to keep a promise to that young gentleman. In other words, Mr. Fitch employed not the simple expedients which are, after all, sufficient to bring jealousy to a head and set it gnawing at character and happiness, but a highly colored and artificial — and rather needlessly unpleasant — set of circumstances. To create a play that should excite, he depended in reality more on plot than on character, and his study of character suffered accordingly. It seemed less typical, because its setting was not typical at all, did not spring from the character but the arbitrary will of the dramatist. This is, of course, to admit that Mr. Fitch was here too much a man of the theatre, and not free from the lingering Scribe conventions. But it in no wise proves that he was not an artist because

the jealous Jinny, instead of being a regal figure, a modern Cleopatra, perhaps, was a frail, trivial, commonplace, every-day sort of female.

"The Truth," unsuccessful in America, where it was produced by Mrs. Bloodgood in October, 1906, successful in London, where Miss Marie Tempest played it in April, 1907, and later taking a place in the repertoire of several Continental theatres, comes the nearest to being a completely satisfactory drama of all Mr. Fitch's works. For two acts, indeed, it has hardly a flaw. His preoccupation with amusing detail for its own sake has vanished. Engaged seriously in the study of a woman who, paradoxically, was both true at heart and a petty liar with her tongue, involving herself in webs of deceit, Mr. Fitch lays his preparation for the final inevitable blow to her husband's love with quiet ease, steady progression, and convincing naturalness. Printed, these acts are almost as engrossing and plausible as on the stage. They must satisfy even the "literary" critic!

And then once more Mr. Fitch is beset by his virtues. Enter Becky's father, a gambling, degenerate old rake, and the serio-comic landlady from Baltimore with whom he lives. The scene is transferred to their establishment, and though the father at least may claim some

positive dramatic value by explaining Becky's inherited proclivities to prevaricate (the playwrights would be hard put without the good old law of heredity!), the key of the drama is appreciably changed, a mood perilously close to farce creeps in. Mr. Fitch always claimed living originals for these characters. But that does not strengthen his case in the least. Comic characters, however true, distract from the mood of tragedy or of serious character study, divert the attention, and so are false to the higher purpose of the play. One suspects that in Europe these two characters in the presentation were "toned down," and naturally in Europe it was not their comic element of truthful caricature which stood out, but their occasional emotional appeal. That may explain the greater success of the play abroad. Being superficially less realistic there, it was at bottom more so.

Mr. Fitch's faults in these two serious character studies of his, then, were the faults of his virtues — his preoccupation with the desire to make a story for his play that should interest the large general public, and his gift of sprightly, more or less satiric, observation, which he could not quite keep within bounds, even in a drama of grave import. He was too often as one who jested in a sermon. In "The Girl with the Green Eyes" he missed his mark

because his plot was artificial and did not fuse with the simple reality of his character study. The plot exposed the character, the character did not condition the plot. In "The Truth" he missed his mark because he could not keep to the one mood of gravity, and lost his hold on the emotions of his audience by losing himself in the comic depiction of exaggerated types quite aside from his main issue. In "The City," Mr. Fitch's last play, posthumously produced in November, 1909, and plainly lacking his guiding and reshaping hand at rehearsal, he created what he himself is said to have regarded as his finest work. It is, at any rate, his most masculine work, for once putting forth a man as the chief personage and seriously studying him. But here again occurs the paradox — his virtue is his fault. His play fails of his higher purpose because plot and purpose do not comport.

"The City" is, supposedly, an exposition of the idea that New York, or, for that matter, any large city, "shows up" a man in his true colors, brings to the surface his keenest ambitions and largest interests, so that if those ambitions and interests are unworthy, the man comes to know it, and the world comes to know it also. The people from the little town of Middleberg in Mr. Fitch's play were moral hypocrites, as their father had been before

them. It was not till they satisfied their longings and got into the thick of affairs in New York that they were brought to realize the fact, however. This is a fresh and perhaps a just view of urban influence. But the play fails of making it clear and convincing, because Mr. Fitch, too concerned with his theatrical story, brought about the revelation of hypocrisy to the hero not by the influence of the city but by the plotting of a single character, the degenerate and illegitimate offspring of the country father. For the working out of that long, lurid, and theatrically exciting second act, the scene of the story need really never have left Middleberg. Mr. Fitch, too intent on his plot, forgot his purpose. His instinct was right. It was a virtue. He lacked the genius, however, to fuse his story with the exposition of character and the development of an intellectual idea. Not his preoccupation with petty people was his artistic weakness — though it may have been his moral weakness — but his lack of a balanced intellectual judgment on his own work, of a sufficient power of concentration on one mood or one idea.

Admitting these, his limitations, his half-failures and incomplete realizations, we must at the same time admit his positive merits and, striking the balance, judge him as one whose contributions to stage literature possessed con-



siderable truth and value of themselves, and have been of even more significance as influence and example. In the long array of his plays, stretching over a period of almost twenty years, will be found a varied record of the foibles and fashions of the hour, the turns of speech which characterized the fleeting seasons, our little local ways of looking at little things, the popular songs we were singing, the topics which were uppermost in our social chat, our taste in decoration, our amusements, the deeper interests, even, of our leisured classes; and always a portrait gallery of vividly drawn minor characters of great historic interest. Supplement the texts and stage directions of Mr. Fitch's plays with a collection of flash-light photographs of the original productions, to picture the costumes and settings (a collection of such stage photographs would be of great value to any historical library), and they will afford twenty, fifty, a hundred years hence a more authentic and vivid record of our American life from 1890 to 1910, so far as it was lived in the gayer parts of town, than any other documents, whether the files of the newspapers or the fiction of the hour. The minute and faithful gift of observation which was his gave Mr. Fitch's plays at once their most immediate appeal and their most lasting value. Ruskin



long ago pointed out that the only "historical painting" which will have value for our descendants is our record of our own times. The same is true of drama. Our descendants will not care what we thought of the French Revolution or even of the Civil War. But what we thought of our own immediate surroundings will be to them of historic interest and worth. They, at least, will be glad that the best of Mr. Fitch's plays have been preserved in print.

And because his appeal was so immediate, because his success, due to his keen and sprightly observation, was so great, his influence on other dramatists, consciously or not, was far-reaching and for good. He encouraged a more subtle and painstaking stage-management — a reform that in America still has a long way to go. He taught the value of a seemly setting for a play, of accuracy and solidity of scenery. He encouraged by his success the choice of American subjects and the stage illustration of American manners. When he began to write, the percentage of native American dramas in a single season was very small, and the characters in them were often native only in name. To-day the percentage of native dramas produced in a given year far exceeds the percentage of foreign plays, and most of them are now con-

cerned with contemporary themes and people with characters recognizably American. It is impossible, of course, to estimate Mr. Fitch's share in this result, but that it was considerably more than that of any other single man, no one familiar with American theatrical conditions can doubt.

A man of the actual theatre, with the failings as well as the virtues of a man of the theatre, without the consciousness of a prophet's call nor the intellectual assurance of a self-appointed leader, Clyde Fitch led by his practical success as a maker of popular plays which were also truthful plays. That those plays obeyed the tendency of the times and led the theatre still farther from poetry and true romance there is no question. The pendulum had to swing. It is still swinging. The mission of the theatre to-day is to give reflective realism a full and fair trial. So far as he could, Mr. Fitch instinctively made his plays realistic, he commented upon the life about him by showing it on the stage as he saw it, often through the glass of a kindly irony. Because truth always makes its way when it is not dully presented, he was popularly successful above most other playwrights. They studied the secrets of his success and wrote better plays themselves. The public — which never studies — felt the secrets of his

success and demanded better plays. A man who has done this for the theatre need not fear that the theatre will forget him. But to deserve so well of the theatre, to have contributed so much to stage literature, is not yet, in popular estimation, to have become a man of letters. One is only left to speculate whether, after all, some acknowledged men of letters deserve so well of fame for any contributions they have made to vital truth in art.

### WILLIAM WINTER — AN APPRECIATION

In the month of August, 1909, William Winter, "the dean of American dramatic critics," and almost the last link between the literary America of the mid-Victorian epoch and the bustling present, resigned his post on the New York *Tribune*, which he had adorned for almost half a century and which he had filled with untiring zeal and unflagging devotion to what he deemed the best ideals of journalism.

On the reasons for that resignation we need not touch here. A point, evidently, was reached where modern newspaper policy and Mr. Winter's policy could not harmonize.

Speech was "freer" in the old days. What concerns us at present, when Mr. Winter has retired from active service, is his contribution to American criticism, his unique position to-day in American letters, and the man himself, as he has appeared for so long on "first nights" in New York, amid glitteringly jeweled women and men more or less distinguished, to the thoughtful person easily the most notable figure in the theatre and the most interesting.

As those of us who belong to the new generation recall him at the playhouse, he appeared an old man, a little bowed and feeble, who leaned on his son's arm as he climbed the aisle, and after a particularly dull or trivial performance looked pathetically weary. He long ago laughingly remarked that his constitution was gone and he was living on the by-laws. His hair was snowy white and so was his mustache; he wore no beard. His height was rather less than the average and recently seemed still shorter, for the stoop. He seldom wore evening clothes at the theatre, and on cold or stormy nights in winter a white muffler enveloped him to the ears, sometimes remaining round his neck through the entire performance. His seats were always well to the front, and after he had come down the aisle on his son's arm he would sink into

the chair, settle far down till only his white head was visible, and remain there till it was time to leave for "down-town" and the grind of copy for the morning *Tribune*. Amid the chattering ranks of the younger critics, the flashing diamonds and low necks of the women, the animated, well-dressed — and overdressed — throng at a New York first night, this frail, white-haired old man, with the countenance and air of an older school of American manners, seemed almost an anachronism.

But that face, and particularly the eyes, gave the lie to his bodily frailty. He must always have had the face of a scholar and dreamer, thin, pale, with a sensitive mouth and a nose chiseled as sharply and delicately as a statue, which age made the more beautiful. And his eyes, when they woke to interest in the play, burned as keenly as the youngest.

In his latest book of literary reminiscence Mr. Winter tells of catching Holmes once when the genial Autocrat supposed he was unobserved and watching his face change from grave to gay at a passing thought.

"Much can be learned," he says, "if you have the privilege of looking at a great man when he is alone, wrapt in thought."

So, once, I watched Mr. Winter pass out

of the Garden Theatre during the last act of Mrs. Campbell's production of "The Joy of Living," a play by Sudermann which he strongly condemned. He was scowling as he entered the lobby from the auditorium. Then, suddenly, he laughed, a quiet, chuckling laugh, and his feeble pace quickened, as if he were impatient to get to his copy paper. Always a master of ironic invective, some barbed shaft of wit had occurred to him and he was joying over it. Indeed, I remember that criticism the next morning as one of his most brilliant and witty, though my own judgment of the play and the actress was passionately in their favor.

He took always this pleasure in his work; his reviews were not so much "filler" for the capacious columns of the *Tribune* as finished pieces of artistry for their own sake. As a matter of fact, many of them were not written in the brief hour between the closing of the play and the time of sending the paper to press. No human pen, in that time, could have produced the columns which he wrote about Mansfield, Booth, Irving. Much, from long experience, he was able to prepare beforehand, and when he reached the office of his newspaper — dreading elevators, he always wrote on the ledge of the counting-room downstairs — he had but to make corrections and addi-



tions to his proofs. He could, however, write as much as the youngest in the hurried hour after the performance; and what he then wrote, while often more concise, was no less polished in diction and illuminated with wit than his prepared essays. You could not hurry him to the point of loose thought or lax English. His brain was too quick and keen, his mastery of style too sure. And the passion of his reviews, the moral earnestness, the sheer weight of their rolling sentences, the richness of their vocabulary, adjectives rallying in battalions to support a noun, the incisive logic, and at times the biting sarcasm, made what he wrote, to the end, as much more virile than the writings of us younger chaps as his body the night before seemed frailer.

To speak in the past tense of his beautiful white head in the theatre and of his dignified, authoritative reviews in the *Tribune* is for one of us, at least, a saddening task. Doubtless other works of reminiscence will still come from his pen; but even by those who most strongly dissented from his judgments of dramas — thoughtful people could much less often dissent from his judgment of acting — his daily reviews of the New York stage will be sorely missed. He was needed, and his like will always be needed.

His dramatic reviews disclosed a curious



blend of the Puritan and the sentimentalist. William Winter was a Puritan by environment, a sentimentalist by nature — and the two went hand in hand. He was born in Gloucester, Massachusetts, in 1836, the son of a sea-captain; but his boyhood years were spent in Boston, where he moved amid the stirring events, literary and political and spiritual, which marked the period of Boston's golden age of American leadership. It is hard for us of to-day to understand the precocity of the youth of fifty years ago. In 1854, when he was only eighteen years old, Mr. Winter's first book was published in Boston. It brought him some recognition and appears to have opened to him the columns of the *Transcript*. Nowadays a youth of eighteen is playing football at Andover or Exeter, and thinking of Harvard entrance examinations, not publishing a book. At this time, too, Mr. Winter won the lifelong friendship of another youth of eighteen, whose first book had just been published in New York. This lad was Thomas Bailey Aldrich. One eighteen-year-old poet wrote nice things in the *Transcript* about the other eighteen-year-old poet, and the friendship began. Mr. Winter has printed some of Aldrich's letters of that period. They are astonishingly well written, witty, keen, entertaining. Our expensively educated boys to-day

could no more write such letters than they could fly — rather less, indeed, for that time-hallowed comparison is now obsolete! These letters are also sentimental, which would not be astonishing in any boy — or shall we say man? — of eighteen, save Thomas Bailey Aldrich. In later life long residence in Boston froze that side of him from the world's eye.

Mr. Winter, at eighteen, however, was not yet prepared to support himself by literature, so he went to the Harvard Law School. There not only the Puritan peace of Cambridge but the Puritan peace of Longfellow, who made a friend of the young man, must have had a great influence upon him. On graduation he was admitted to the Suffolk bar and even practiced for a time. He also took the stump for the antislavery cause, caught up by the great wave of Puritan moral passion which was then sweeping over New England. Sumner and Wendell Phillips, Theodore Parker, and even, in his early years, Channing, were men to whom he listened, on whose ideals of oratory his ideals were based, by whose ideals of liberty and virtue his Puritan soul was shaped. He could no more have escaped the influence of this environment than Emerson could have moved away from Concord.

But he was also a sentimentalist. A man of passionate friendships and equally passion-

ate dislikes, a hero-worshiper of Longfellow, poetry was one of his loves — so strong a one that it seemed to him of greater interest than politics or law or reform. His place, by temperament, was in speech rather than action, in literature rather than life. Perhaps, too, for all his Puritan principles, there was something in him that protested against the primness which goes with the Puritan, and against the frigidity and aloofness of the Boston Chippendales, to borrow Judge Grant's now indispensable name. Mr. Winter's Gloucester captains must have brought some sprig of vine-leaves from over seas and put it in his hair. His beloved Longfellow never had vine-leaves in *his* hair. Perish the thought! And though Walt Whitman later said of Mr. Winter, "Willy, he's a young Longfellow," — which was by no means intended as a compliment, — the "young Longfellow" left Boston in 1859, to try his fortunes in New York. Nobody can imagine the older Longfellow ever leaving Cambridge for New York — deserting Brattle Street for Broadway.

Once in New York, the young poet abandoned all pretence of the law, which could never have been a congenial occupation to him, and embarked on the sea of journalism and literature, then less charted than now and much less likely to lead to fortune. He cast

in his lot with the so-called "Bohemians" who used to gather in Pfaff's restaurant, on Broadway, near Bleecker Street, and got his first employment as subeditor of a weekly called the *Saturday Review*, edited by "the Prince of Bohemia," Henry Clapp, Jr., a brilliant, witty, sarcastic man, who aimed to tell the truth about everybody in his journal and had more enemies than subscribers. It was Clapp who said that Horace Greeley was "a self-made man who worshiped his creator"; and, when his paper resumed operations after a suspension of many months, he printed the following announcement:

"This paper was stopped in 1860, for want of means; it is now started again, for the same reason."

There can be little doubt that the influence of this uncannily clever man and the satirical tone of his paper developed another side of the young recruit from Boston, which, if Mr. Winter had stayed in Massachusetts — Longfellow tried to buy a paper for him in Cambridge — would probably have remained dormant. He would have written for the *Atlantic Monthly*, with appropriately proper decorum, and we should have been the poorer without his scathing wit, applied for nearly half a

century to correct abuses on our stage, to snuff out upstart players, and to rebuke a present too prone to forget its past.

Fitz-James O'Brien, George Arnold, Thomas Bailey Aldrich and Walt Whitman were other members of the "Bohemians." But for Whitman Mr. Winter has not now, and seems never to have had, any sympathy. In his book, "Old Friends," he records:

"He did not impress me as anything other than what he was — a commonplace, uncouth, and sometimes obnoxiously coarse writer, trying to be original by using a formless style, and celebrating the proletarians who make the world almost uninhabitable by their vulgarity.

"In those Bohemian days I participated in various talks with Walt Whitman, and once I asked him to oblige me with his definition of 'the poet.' His answer was:

" 'A poet is a maker.'

" 'But, Walt,' I said, 'what does he make?'

"He gazed upon me for a moment with that bovine air of omniscience for which he was remarkable, and then he said:

" 'He makes poems.' "

Mr. Winter adds that this reply was deemed final. Certainly the circle was completed!

The life of the *Saturday Review* was not long. In 1865 Mr. Winter became the dra-

matic critic of the New York *Tribune*, then edited by Horace Greeley, and he occupied the post from that date until 1909. For many years he wielded a supreme influence among American critics of the drama; and, more recently, after the spirit of the times had drifted hopelessly beyond his liking, he still wrote with undiminished vigor and passion in defense of his earlier ideals, and still rebuked all other critics of the drama by the precision of his prose, the weight of his convictions, the poetic glamour of his descriptions of great acting.

From that time, too, his literary friends grew more numerous and, from the view-point of the present, more important. They included George William Curtis, Bayard Taylor, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Edmund Clarence Stedman, Richard Henry Stoddard, Wilkie Collins, Donald G. Mitchell, and Artemus Ward. But it was among actors, perhaps, that his warmest friendships lay. He was the intimate friend and adviser of Booth and Barrett, of Jefferson and Irving, of Augustin Daly and Miss Rehan. That he wrote about them made no difference, as perhaps was natural, since he wrote in praise!

But, after all, it is not his bond of friendship with the great figures in our literature and on our stage twenty-five or fifty years ago that makes him most significant and interest-



ing. It is the fact that, as a critic of the drama, he wrote about a fine art, finely. So few have done that in this country, so few are doing it to-day, that William Winter stands almost unique. This statement is not intended as disparagement of the many earnest and intelligent men who are writing about the stage for American newspapers to-day. It is simply an admission that Mr. Winter brought to the task what very few of them can bring, in any such degree — an instinctive knowledge of acting, widened by long experience; a remarkably logical brain in controversy; a keen wit, which he knew how to employ for purposes of emphasis, not self-exploitation; the rhetorical fluency of a poet; and a prose style which, though fashioned in an elder day and bearing about it something too much of ponderous stateliness, was yet, first and always, *a style*. A great many writers of popular books do not possess a style. Still fewer newspaper writers possess one. But without style criticism cannot become literature, any more than a "best-seller" can become literature; criticism cannot be creative. God — and hard practice — gave a style to William Winter; and for forty-four years he employed it in the columns of a newspaper for the service of the American stage. For that reason some of his reviews have a more lasting value than the plays they de-



scribe. "Criticism," says the mob, "is nothing but a picking to pieces." So it is — when written by little critics. In the hands of a large man, who is also a man of letters, criticism may become creative, may gain a permanence of form to make it literature. Because it frequently became so in the hands of William Winter, his place in the history of the American theatre is assured.

Let us take one illustration of his style. It is not in such a tart sentence as that of his describing two players in "Romeo and Juliet," who reminded him of two grasshoppers "pursuing their stridulous loves in the hollow of a cabbage-leaf." It is not in such a flowing phrase of merry irony as this:

"Mme. Bernhardt sometimes made her sexual monsters interesting — wielding the lethal hairpin or the persuasive hatchet with Gallic grace and sweet celerity."

Nor is it in his eulogistic passages, where his prose tended to become Johnsonian and a little supercharged with sentiment. But there is a supreme example in his book, "Old Friends." He is speaking of Margaret Fuller, whom he disliked, if for no other reason, because she had dared to criticise Longfellow. Here is his paragraph about her:

“Invidious criticism of Longfellow’s poetry was written, with peculiar zest, by Miss Margaret Fuller, a native of Cambridge, who married an Italian and became Countess d’Ossoli. She was a clever woman, of a somewhat tart temper, and prone to the peevish ill-nature of a discontented mind. In the early days of the New York *Tribune* she was a contributor to that paper, and, more or less, to the perplexities of its eccentric founder, Horace Greeley. Both Longfellow and his wife spoke of her to me with obvious, though courteously veiled, dislike. Her health was not robust; she suffered from some form of spinal disease that caused her occasionally to wriggle when seated. She figures among the writers commemorated by the venomous industry of Rufus Wilmot Griswold, and she is chiefly remembered as having perished in a shipwreck on the southern coast of Long Island.”

This light and airy flight of a poisoned arrow is style at its perfection; it is wit chained and driven by a master. But why say more? The paragraph is complete. It makes you forget Mr. Winter’s review of “Brown of Harvard,” which concluded about as follows:

“Mr. Woodruff sang a pretty song. There was no acting.”

Faults as a critic Mr. Winter had, of course. Chief among them many of the present gen-

eration will probably count his consistent and unremitting hostility to the new drama of realism, especially to every attempt to put upon the stage, even with the most honest of intentions, any picture of the seamy side of life. It was that hostility, without question, which lost Mr. Winter influence in later years, for he was waging a hopeless fight, trying to dam an irresistible stream of tendency with the *Tribune*! But he never fought so well, nor so wittily, as when he was fighting Pinero and Shaw and Ibsen and Sudermann and the rest of the moderns. And, after all, it is good to have such a fighter for the old order among us. We need to be held back long enough to be made to consider well why we think the new thing the true thing. Such a restraining voice was Mr. Winter's.

I have called him a Puritan and a sentimentalist. He was a Puritan in his conception of art as something that should always "leave a pleasant taste in the mouth"; in his Ruskinian passion for morality on the stage. He was too much of a Puritan to see that a play about immorality is only immoral if its author intended it to wake in us evil thoughts; that the lewd farce is immoral, while Ibsen's "Ghosts" — to take one of his pet aversions — fills us only with pity, horror, and compassion. Mr. Winter, who could call a spade a spade in his

reviews, insisted that it should be called an agricultural implement on the stage, if it had to be mentioned at all. He was a sentimentalist in his conception of art, because in his esthetic scheme there was no place for realism, pleasant or unpleasant, only for "the delicate exaggeration of life," of which he so often spoke; and no place for didactic drama, only for entertainment. One is almost tempted to say that he was a large mind demanding of art that story-book unreality so dear to small minds, and to women. He loved his Shakespeare passionately; he loved the artificial comedy of an elder day; he loved "the well-made play" of incident and suspense, for its stirring theatric effect. For the modern drama, since Ibsen, he had no liking, no tolerance. It belonged to another generation of esthetic ideals.

Of acting, however, Mr. Winter always knew more than any other American critic, and he kept his instincts generally true till the day he laid down his pen, even though his early ideals had been shaped by the older rhetorical and "heroic" school. He was, for example, in recent years a warm champion of Mrs. Fiske, our arch naturalist. He was such an ardent admirer when he admired, and such a "good hater" when he hated, that often his praise seemed overwrought, his condemnation

unduly bitter. Witness his remarks about the two poor players in "Romeo and Juliet." But a good lover and a good hater, especially in these days of "letting down easy," is a stimulating person, after all, and worth a thousand little critics balancing timidly on the fence, afraid to fall on either side.

And almost always, it must be remembered, William Winter hated the bad, admired and praised the good, in acting. He possessed a delicate intuitive perception of what the author intended a character to be, and he could separate the actor from the part and then tell, in no uncertain language, whether he was realizing that part or not, and if not, why not. That "why not" baffles most critics of the stage. Read their notices, and you find them chiefly concerned with the play. A paragraph or two is tagged on the end, saying that So-and-So was "adequate" — atrocious word, which means nothing. William Winter knew the art of acting, its possibilities, its limitations. He never resorted to the subterfuge of meaningless words to cover his ignorance. He told, in exact, skilfully chosen language, just what the actor had or had not done; and notably in such reviews as his essays on Jefferson, Booth, or Irving he could make you, the reader, feel long afterward the charm and thrill of a great performance.

H. T. Parker has recently written of him in the Boston *Transcript*:

“Paltry little stars, of no possible account except to themselves, their managers, and an ephemeral public, he treated with becoming scorn. If the player was blundering, but promising, he could be a sedulous instructor in a way that has rather gone out of the fashion in reviewing. Above all, since the reviewing of acting is designed more for the public that reads than for the players that act, Mr. Winter, with his warmth of imagination and his artistry of word, could summon the impersonation that he had seen and was testing. Plays, too often, have been his texts for preachments. Actors and acting he has touched with knowledge, sympathy, imagination, even poetry.”

The results of that knowledge and sympathy were graciously written records of our foremost players for nearly half a century, found in his lives of Booth, Mansfield, and Jefferson, his “*Shadows of the Stage*,” his “*Other Days*,” and in the files of the *Tribune* — from which they should be rescued. These records, and not his poetry, will probably be Mr. Winter’s specific contribution to American letters.

But, more immediately, he has exercised, whether upon those who agree or who disagree with his views, a stimulating and not unneeded influence for a more dignified and



sincere conception of dramatic criticism, for a finer standard of writing about a fine art. In his last contribution to the *Tribune* he said:

“The obligation resting upon such a writer, accordingly, is clear. He must write for the information and benefit of readers.

“The task of the critic exacts specific qualifications and steadfast allegiance to high and stern principles, intellectual and moral. It is a part of his duty to know the literature of the drama; to discriminate betwixt declamation and acting, betwixt appearance and impersonation; to see the mental, moral, and spiritual aspects of the stage, and likewise to see the popular, the expedient, and the mercenary aspects of it; to make due allowance for all the obstacles that confront well-intended endeavor; to hold the scale true; to reach the intelligence of a great public of miscellaneous readers; to respect, as far as possible, the feelings and ambitions of actors; to praise with discretion and yet with force — displaying somewhat more than the fervor of an animated clam; to censure without undue severity; to denounce explicitly, and as often as necessary, the influences, often operant by misuse of the stage, that would vitiate taste and morals; to think quickly and speak quickly, yet make no error; to check, oppose, and discomfit on all occasions the leveling spirit of sordid “commercialism,” which is forever striving to degrade every high ideal and mobble it in the ruck of mediocrity; to give not alone knowledge, study, and technical skill, in



the exercise of literary art, for the good of the theatre, but also the best power of the mind and the deepest feelings of the heart to the celebration and embellishment of the labor of others."

This is a splendid ideal. For forty-four years, to the best of his ability and according to the light God gave him, William Winter tried to follow it. Will men say as much of the rest of us when we lay down our pens? And, if they should, should we not have to admit, should we not gladly admit, that he was one of the first to follow it in the theatrical journalism of America, and, by the fame he won and the example he set, put us on the way?

## ORGANIZING AUDIENCES

### THE DRAMA LEAGUE OF AMERICA

A hopeful sign of progress in our theatre in recent years has been the growth in several parts of the country of a tendency to regard the theatre not merely as an amusement to be patronized indiscriminately but as a social force to be studied and at times to be, if possible, regulated. Not only have several of our Eastern universities, led by Harvard, placed

the study of the practical drama where it belongs, as a branch of the Fine Arts, but the MacDowell Club of New York, an association of students and practitioners of the several arts, in the autumn of 1909 appointed a committee on drama which visited the various theatres during the season and recommended to the club such plays as seemed artistically worthy, arranged a series of readings of American dramas, and in other ways strove to encourage intelligent play-going among the six hundred members of the organization; the Twentieth Century Club of Boston during the same season investigated every place of amusement in the city, covering a period of ten weeks, in an effort to determine exactly what sort of plays and picture shows were being presented and what steps could be taken to improve their quality; for two seasons that worthy organization, the People's Institute of New York, has officially censored all the moving-picture films shown in the six hundred picture houses of the city, to protect the thousands of juvenile patrons; and, finally, in the spring of 1910, the Drama Club of Evanston, Illinois, after quietly working for two years among its own members, called a meeting of various women's clubs in and near Chicago and organized the Drama League of America.

For the benefit of any who would like

to communicate with the League the list of officers elected for the first year is here presented:

*President:* MRS. A. STARR BEST, Evanston Drama League.

*Vice-presidents:* MRS. HENRY L. FRANK, Chicago Woman's Club; DR. RICHARD BURTON, University of Minnesota; MRS. E. P. SHERRY, Milwaukee; DR. WILLIAM NORMAN GUTHRIE, Tennessee; MRS. OTIS SKINNER, Bryn Mawr; and LOUIS KAUFMAN ANSPACHER, New York.

*Secretary:* MRS. H. W. DUNCANSON, 5457 Winthrop Ave., Chicago.

There is the possibility of much genuine achievement in these various movements, if they are wisely guided. The censorship of moving-picture films has already affected the entire country, for no manufacturer wishes to put out a film that cannot be rented in New York City. The reports on plays prepared by the committee of the MacDowell Club, while as yet their effect is scarcely appreciable outside of the limited membership of the club, will in another season be sent to other organizations, where they may make here and there a few patrons for a worthy play. The Twentieth Century Club of Boston has at least called attention to certain abuses of the theatre, which the newspapers, for advertising reasons, ignore, even if much of the prelimi-

nary work has been conducted in the narrowly Puritanic spirit characteristic of the Hub. But it is the work begun by the Drama Club of Evanston, now to be continued on a wider scale by the Drama League, which holds the possibilities of the most far-reaching results.

The Drama Club prepared for its members a course of reading in dramatic literature. It caused to be reserved on a special shelf in the public library all the books about the stage contained there, and in one season added one hundred volumes to the collection. And it encouraged more directly among its members attendance upon the best plays current in the theatre. It will be the object of the Drama League, no doubt, to do these same things in every community where a women's club or other organization exists which will consent to join the movement. This means an organized attempt to train audiences, to stimulate a study of the theory of the theatre and to increase attendance upon the better class of plays in the actual playhouse. The movement, naturally, is largely among the women of the country, and already it has extended to clubs embracing a total membership of several thousand. If it could be still farther extended to include all the women's clubs of the land, and if it could maintain their interest and successfully stimulate their growth in appreciation, its

power for good in the American theatre would be almost incalculable.

For were it not for the ladies half our theatres would shut up shop. Matinée audiences at the better class of playhouses are almost entirely feminine, and evening audiences are usually sixty to seventy per cent feminine, too. Moreover, Charles Burnham, who has been a theatrical manager for forty years, has remarked that half the men who do come to see serious plays come because their wives or sweethearts want to. Left to themselves, says Mr. Burnham, the men would go to a musical comedy, a vaudeville show, or their club. There is a good deal of truth in this statement. The fate of the drama in America lies much more in the hands of the women than a first thought would suppose.

It has been affirmed, even in the face of the dramas of Miss Crothers, that a woman cannot write a play. She hardly needs to if her sex can dictate what kind of plays are produced. That her sex does dictate in the theatre there can be no question. The manager who controls the American rights to the dramas of Henry Arthur Jones refused to produce here "Dolly Reforming Herself," because he said it would offend American women. The managers of "The Fourth Estate," standing in the lobby at the conclusion of the open-

ing performances in New York, listened to the remarks of the women as they left the theatre and on the basis of those remarks caused the author to alter his ending, to rescue his hero from death and precipitate him upon the palpitating and type-imprinted bosom of the heroine. It was this same managerial fear of offending the feminine love of a happy conclusion to every play which caused the mercenary Bernstein to maltreat his drama, "Israel," in return for American dollars. Cases could be multiplied *ad infinitum* of the direct influence upon our drama of the feminine standards of taste in the theatre. At a performance of a serious play in New York last winter the popular actress who assumed the leading rôle wore a plain, severe cloth dress in the opening act, as befitted the character. A woman in the audience was heard to remark with a sigh to her companion, "Well, perhaps she'll wear something better in the next act!" At a performance of Stephen Phillips' tragedy of "Herod" a woman was overheard to say, "There! This is the last play I'll let my husband pick out for me. I've seen two suicides already this week and now the dead are piling up three deep." So much for poetic tragedy!

Such remarks as these cannot be smiled away. The managers listen to them, and pick their plays accordingly.



We are all acquainted, unfortunately, with the woman who "knows what she likes." This generally means that she regards the drama as a kind of mental warm bath or emotional chocolate cream; that she refuses to consider a play for its truth to the conditions depicted, for its logical conclusions, for its artistic integrity, but judges it according as it measures down to her limited standards of appreciation or amiably tickles her sentimental tracts. If the subject matter of a play does not please her she will have nothing to do with it. There is a story of a man who could not appreciate a beautiful etching of a child because, he said, he did n't like babies. That is the attitude of too many women toward the theatre. What the general masculine attitude is has nothing to do with the present case. The attitude of the feminine portion of the audience counts for more, at any rate, since in the theatre the majority rules.

Barrett Wendell once cynically remarked that the duty of the drama seems to be to send the suburbs home happy. An important element of suburban life now, sharing attention with bridge whist, automobiles, and babies, is the Woman's Club. In the Woman's Club culture is attended to. Classes in domestic science discuss the cost of living and Mrs. Brown's social standing. Classes in literature



discuss the works of Matthew Arnold and Robert W. Chambers. Classes in art listen to rhapsodies on Raphael. Lectures abound on every conceivable subject, and some which are not conceivable. Is it going to be possible for the drama to gain by this universal, if too often superficial seeking for sweetness and light; for the drama to get itself acknowledged as an art worthy of serious study, not the classic drama of the printed page, but the drama of the actual playhouse, of here and now? Will there come a time when the suburbs, tripping to town for a *matinée*, will seek not to be sent home happy, but to find the enjoyment of truthful, logical depiction upon the stage of the facts of life, not blinked at, not glossed over with the veneer of sentimentality, but set forth if need be mercilessly; to find, also, the enjoyment of poetry, of satire, of fantasy, of tragedy?

That, I take it, is the problem the Drama League has set itself to solve.

There are thousands of women's clubs in this country. Their membership is an important part of theatrical audiences, and concerted action by all these theatre-goers could make the success of a play, while the guaranty of such concerted action could often induce a manager to mount a drama for which otherwise he would not assume the risk. It is,

however, extremely difficult to make anybody go to a play by telling him he ought to. Concerted action on so large a scale as materially and visibly to affect the fate of any specific play is probably not immediately possible, though it is said that the League in its first season greatly aided the engagement of the New Theatre Company in Chicago.

But, wisely conducted, the Drama League can, through the women's clubs, in a steadily increasing degree leaven popular appreciation and make for the slow increase of a public for the drama as an art. That in time, of course, will directly react upon the managers, encouraging them more and more to produce worthy plays without perverted or illogical adaptation to meet the supposed demands of the feminine auditors. The American attitude toward the theatre is too often expressed completely in the one word so frequently on our lips — the word "show." "What's the show at the Empire this week?" we say. And therein we express not so much our contempt for as our total indifference to the drama as an art. Until we ourselves alter this attitude there will be little alteration in managerial policies.

The ways in which the women's clubs can make for the increase of a public for the drama as an art are two.

First, as in the case of music, or as in the

case of scholarship in a university or school, they can create an atmosphere of respect for the better and more serious things, they can break down that smug self-satisfaction so common to small minds and so well exemplified by the lady who "knows what she likes." In a community where scholarship is respected a youth is ashamed to admit ignorance. In a community where the drama is respected a man or woman is ashamed to admit failure to understand and enjoy the better things. Shame is a great spur. What is accomplished in any branch of activity in a community depends on the communistic ideal.

Second, the women's clubs can more directly make for the increase of a public for drama as an art by the appointment of a carefully chosen committee to watch the theatres in each community and to recommend to the club's attention such plays as are worthy of consideration on artistic grounds, to stimulate interest in these plays and study of them in advance of their coming, and to urge all members to patronize them when they arrive.

To accomplish the first of these aims, to create an atmosphere of respect for the art of the theatre, lectures, the study of printed plays, the consideration of sound criticism — all have their place. It is bound to be a matter of slow growth. Before there can be any

proper respect for the art of the theatre, one needs must understand what the art of the theatre is, and it is no easier to learn the principles of that art than of any other. But it has, to a certain extent, been accomplished in the case of music, and it can be accomplished in the case of drama. Books about music are in great demand. Books about the drama should be no less diligently circulated. Perhaps, too, a widespread interest in printed plays would have the wholesome effect of inducing publishers to issue the texts of successful dramas, which would not only make for a more careful public consideration of these plays, but would stimulate the authors to a more careful and polished writing. A thousand demands for a printed text—not an impossible number, surely—would probably bring results in the publisher's office.

Many of our colleges to-day are doing splendid work to increase intelligent consideration of the practical theatre. It is no part of the training gained under such a man as Professor Baker of Harvard or Professor Phelps of Yale to deprecate a good musical comedy, a funny farce, or any other form of enjoyable dramatic entertainment. What is sought is the ability to discriminate between the false and the true, and a corresponding regard for the true and scorn of the false. To say that

the ability to discriminate between the false and the true does not exist to a considerable extent among American theatre-goers everywhere, to be sure, would be absurd. But the popular reception of such a play as "A Fool There Was," for instance, or "The Fighting Hope," shows that the ability is less general than we could wish it, and the languishing interest in many sound and true plays, such as Laurence Irving's adaptations of Brieux's dramas, shows that a loyal enthusiasm for truth in the theatre is less strong than the desire for mere amusement.

After all, amusement is a relative term. What amuses the child does not amuse his parents. What amused a man who had never been to any theatrical entertainment but a vaudeville show might conceivably not amuse him after he had seen Sothorn and Marlowe, David Warfield, the New Theatre company, and John Drew. Many people have been cured of the popular song habit by listening to Schubert. And the hosts of women who "know what they like" — which means that they refuse to admit there exist any standards of taste but their own, or that the possibility of growth lies open to them after they have graduated into long skirts and matrimony — may conceivably learn to like plays where truth takes the place of sentimentality and

fine acting of pretty clothes and conventional endings, if only they can be induced to attend these plays often enough. One of the ways to make them go to such plays is to create an atmosphere in their club and their community of respect for such plays, and scorn of the intellectual attainments of those who cannot understand. This is fraught with the danger of what Professor Guthrie calls "intellectual snobbery," and many silly fads and undigested "culture" will no doubt result from any considerable effort in this direction. But the possible result is worth the price.

But how are these plays to be discriminat-ingly selected for them, and how are the managers to be encouraged to mount such plays to select from? Many such plays are mounted now, to be sure, but more would undoubtedly reach the stage if public patronage for them were more assured. This work will probably have to be done by committees, and on the judicious selection of such committees, and their judicious conduct in office, will depend, it seems to me, in large measure the success of all such movements as the Drama League, alike for the betterment of the members of the league and of the stage itself.

First and foremost, above everything else, such committees must realize that they are not censors of the stage, that censorship is no part



of their task, that their sole duty is to point out the plays which are artistically effective and true and to urge their clubmates to attend them. Any committee should be composed of men as well as women; it should contain various shades of opinion and taste; but there should be at least one man or woman upon it who is familiar with the history and traditions of the theatre, and none whose judgments cannot command the respect of the community at large.

This committee should have a high, but not a narrow standard, welcoming alike good foreign work, poetic drama, satire, comedy with point, musical pieces which have real musical value, such as "The Chocolate Soldier" or "The Red Mill," and above all truthful native drama depicting contemporary life; and it should completely ignore every play which does not measure up to this standard. The surest way for such a committee to defeat its own end and to render the whole movement ridiculous in the eyes of the community at large — and if it does not command the respect of the community at large it will surely fail — is to attempt to censor plays, to presume to dictate what plays people shall not attend, to blue pencil the drama for the benefit of tender suburban susceptibilities and prejudices, or for the Young Person. The Twentieth Century



Club in Boston has already made itself ridiculous through its drama committee by condemning the last act of "Don" as "immoral"! Doubtless this committee would have thrown a moral fit over "The Easiest Way." There are certain palpably lewd "shows," like "The Girl From Rector's," which may be mentioned as unfit for patronage, though even here any comment is usually an advertisement, and silence is the best means of killing off the breed. If they are too flagrant, let the police revoke the theatre's license.

But in the case of all serious dramas the one and only test to apply to them is, are they true, are they artistically sound, are they dramatically effective? If they are it is the duty of the committee to recommend them, or, if it is still too suburban and hide-bound to forgive them their unpleasant subject matter, to say nothing whatever about them. Men and women capable of writing, producing, and appreciating good drama existed before the Drama League was founded, and the league will gain nothing by telling these people that they are ignoramuses or perverts. One of the reasons so large a portion of the public does not care for the cleansing beauty of poetic tragedy is because it has been so long dieted on sentimentality, has so long demanded to "see something pleasant in the theatre." One

of the reasons there exists so little conscious appreciation of logical development in plays is because we have been unwilling to face the facts of life. One of the first essentials to any real appreciation of the drama as an art is the willingness and desire to let the playwright say his say and to judge him according to his success as a craftsman. Nobody will be helped to an appreciation of poetic drama, of allegory, of any of the higher forms of theatrical art which the Drama League seems to desire, until he — or she — is helped to put aside all prejudice in the theatre and to judge a play solely on its artistic merits, its truth. Nobody will be led to the point of demanding good American plays till he — or she — is ready to give the playwright full swing, and is ready to acclaim him according as his work is vital and veracious.

Our playwrights have too long been willing merely to send the suburbs home happy. It is against this very thing the Drama League proposes in reality to work. It desires our playwrights to send the suburbs home a little wiser, a little more thoughtful, a little more kindled by what the stage has shown to an understanding of humanity, to sympathy, to pity, as well as to a comprehension of poetic glamour or the whispers of romance. This will not be accomplished by trying to dictate

to people what they shall not see, rather than what they shall; it will certainly not be accomplished by trying to make the drama a pleasant refuge from reality and a pastime for young girls.

It is not the duty of our good ladies to make the drama fit for their daughters, but to make their daughters fit for the drama.

This will only be accomplished by encouraging the dramatists to write and the managers to produce plays in which the one test of value is truth to life, artistic integrity, and vital theatric appeal. Such dramas will much more often than not be concerned with "pleasant" subjects, for joy dwells deepest in the human heart, no less in the heart of the artist than any other. But that has nothing to do with the case. What is sought is the encouragement of the drama as an art, and that can only be given by letting the artist write "the thing that he pleases, as pleases him best."

The Drama League can never stop the vulgar breed of managers from producing dirty farces, and that is no part of its business; nor can it compel ladies of the chorus to don long skirts, and that is no part of its business, either. It can, however, induce many of its members to attend the performances of sound, truthful plays, and so help them to an appre-

ciation of the art of the theatre and help the artists of the theatre to gain a wider patronage. That is its duty, and its whole duty. The minute the Drama League or any similar organization begins to wave the moral bugaboo, begins to dictate what plays its members — and inferentially other people — shall not see, its days of usefulness are over, and it will rapidly end by becoming a joke.

## THE CHEAP THEATRE AND THE YOUNG

To seek the sources from which Shakespeare drew his "Hamlet" three centuries ago and to study the effect of a performance of "Hamlet" on the children and young people of a city slum to-day are alike legitimate fields of investigation for the dramatic critic. Which will seem the more important depends upon the critic's temperament. The fact remains, however, that the modern ideals of social service, of the conservation and improvement of our human no less than our material resources, are rapidly extending into the theatre, and unless a critic would write himself down as both narrowly academic and barren of social consciousness he must study

the playhouse no less as a social force than as an æsthetic problem, and no less important to him than the oldest classic or the latest drama by Pinero or Sudermann should be the moving-picture dramas, the vaudeville entertainments, the burlesque "shows" which daily appeal to a vastly larger and vastly less sophisticated portion of the public, including thousands upon thousands of impressionable boys and girls. They are not important to him as a problem in æsthetics, but they are of tremendous consequence as a social force. Until their force is recognized, their many dangerous and even debasing qualities made known, and something better substituted in their place by an awakened public conscience, we have but illy done our duty in the long fight for civic improvement. It should be the task of the dramatic critic to aid in this fight. If he confines his attention alone to the æsthetic problems of the drama in the so-called "first-class theatres," he is, passively at least, retarding progress, delaying the time when the community will use the theatre, as it uses the school, the library, and the playground, for an agent of righteousness, of mental and moral health.

It should be needless to point out the universality of the dramatic instinct, which includes the instinct to find satisfaction and

imaginative release in witnessing stage representations. The "make believe" of children, the romantic fervors of adolescence at the play, the tremendous patronage of the theatre by all classes of adults, attest it. Books, by comparison, appeal to but few people. The appeal of the theatre is vivid, direct, unmistakable. There is a glamour about it like nothing else. It assaults the eye, the ear, the imagination, simultaneously. The child's fancy is stirred to run riot even by a moving picture. The youth is moved in the playhouse to amorous dreams or fired with heroism and romance. The adult finds a refuge from the dullness of existence, or, sometimes, guidance and idealism. And, conversely, the theatre is equally potent for evil suggestion. Yet we have done next to nothing to control this dynamic force in the life of the community, to direct it wisely, to utilize it. We have left the theatre entirely in the hands of men who conducted it for their profit, not ours; and we are only beginning to realize our error.

Curiously enough, this realization was brought about by the much maligned moving pictures. The five and ten cent moving-picture theatre is now a national institution. There are said to be almost ten thousand of them in the United States, two hundred on



Manhattan Island alone. In the cities they largely flourish in the poorer quarters. Out in the smaller centres they have supplied nightly amusement for all classes of the community. At first they were opened in frequently unsanitary rooms, and the quality of the pictures shown was pretty bad, murder, revenge, and especially marital infidelity (supplied by the French manufacturers) being the favorite themes. The settlement workers and school teachers in New York saw thousands upon thousands of children flocking daily to these theatres, spending there the pennies they formerly saved for candy. The juvenile courts were full of cases where crime had been directly incited by the lurid films.

Finally Mr. John Collier, of the People's Institute in New York, with the co-operation of the picture manufacturers, organized a censorship committee. The manufacturers co-operated because they dreaded the public outcry against them, and agreed to put out only such films as the censorship committee approved. This committee has now been active for two years. It is absolutely unofficial, and yet it is able to-day to state that ninety per cent of all the moving pictures publicly shown in the United States have passed its inspection. Fifty per cent of the censored films are to-day of educational value, such as



pictures of great parades, or air-ship flights, or scenes from famous plays, often acted by well-known players, or films with direct and decent dramatic appeal. Thus was the first active and successful effort made to supervise the influence of the cheap theatre, especially over the young.

The moving-picture theatres on Manhattan Island alone can house about one million eight hundred thousand people a week. The Child Welfare Committee estimates that the weekly attendance of boys and girls under eighteen is four hundred and fifty thousand, many more than attend Sunday-school in New York, for example. This vast horde of children comes from the poorer classes. The cheap moving-picture theatre is their refuge, their mental excitement, and their chief imaginative stimulant, as it often is, as well, for the adults. To take the moving-picture show away from them would be the height of folly. It is vastly better that their minds should be active in following the fate of a character in a moving-picture drama than that they should not be stimulated at all. The crux of the problem lies not in taking away what they have, but in supplying them with something better, better first in the moving-picture theatres and the other cheap places of amusement if possible, and later, as public sentiment is aroused to the

gravity of the situation, in true theatres built and endowed for the purpose.

Half the moving-picture theatres now furnish vaudeville between the exhibitions of films. In some instances this vaudeville is coarse beyond words, chiefly in theatres along Broadway, the worst example having been furnished in a theatre owned by two members of the Theatrical Syndicate. But in the majority of houses, in New York at least, it is merely crass, crude, and common. Over this vaudeville the unofficial censorship committee has no control. The four hundred and fifty thousand children weekly listen to silly sentimental songs, atrociously sung, or songs that are stupidly vulgar, and the only music they learn to know, outside of school, is this unspeakable stuff. Their theatrical inspiration comes from the twitching, wordless, mechanical film on a screen, and with it is associated no beauty of language, no charm of music, no glamour of fancy,—only the din of a jangling piano and the raucous scream of a coarse man or woman bawling the inane words of a “popular song” to a tune of pitiful mediocrity. That is the only stimulus the theatre gives to four hundred and fifty thousand impressionable children in New York City every week, four hundred and fifty thousand children eager and hungry for theatrical

pleasure, ripe alike for the best or the worst appeal the stage can make.

While moving pictures claim the attention of nearly half a million children on Manhattan Island each week, burlesque and vaudeville, according to the estimate of the Child Welfare Committee, claim the attention of two hundred and fifty-six thousand more. Over burlesque and vaudeville there is absolutely no control, either official or otherwise, and for the most part both forms of entertainment to-day are absolutely unfit for children, and frequently demoralizing to adults. The appeal of burlesque is frankly sexual, in the grossest sense, and the appeal of vaudeville is often so. When it is not, it is coarse and common. About twenty per cent of the audiences of burlesque in New York City is composed of boys under eighteen years of age. Fortunately, the girls do not frequent this species of play. The thinly veiled lewdness of the posters which disfigure our city bill-boards, advertising these burlesque "shows," very fairly represents the type of play disclosed in the theatres. There is much crude "comedy" and cheap horse play, but the chief appeal is sexual. To watch the stolid faces of the men in the audience while the routine story of the play is progressing, to see the wave of interest and alertness sweep over them when a sex

appeal is put forward, and to see hanging over the rail of the gallery the faces of innumerable boys, subjected in the foul air to influences fouler still, is one of the most disheartening spectacles the city affords.

There was a time when vaudeville was described by an optimistic management as "refined." It has long since ceased to merit the adjective, though parents have not ceased from taking their children to witness it, nor young men and women ceased from seeking it together for their evening's diversion. It never, of course, had any sustained appeal to the attention, which is one source of its popularity, and it never was possessed of imaginative charm. But for children it once, in greater degree than at present, held the charm of acrobatic exhibition and the mystery of sleight of hand, while for older persons there was the real artistry of such performers as Miss Loftus and Chevalier. Recently we have seen Harry Lauder in vaudeville, but he has been a rare exception. The "head liners," as the leading performers are called, have been "diving Venuses," daringly disrobed, English concert-hall singers of coarse songs, men and women from Paris (perhaps) giving an exhibition of utter depravity, undressed dancers in imitation of the females who gyrated in our concert halls a season or two ago under the veiled

excuse (and that was the only thing veiled) of "interpreting" musical masterpieces, and the like. The rank and file of the other performers are usually not indecent, — they are merely hopelessly crass and common. They sing tawdry songs, they crack ancient jests, they dance clumsy dances to the bang, bang, bang of a clumsy band — and that is vaudeville. Thousands of children and young people nightly find their theatrical pleasure in witnessing it. It is their relief, after the day, from grinding toil. It is their "other world," their refuge. Yet it holds nothing better than the world they know. It is noisy, coarse, cheap, tawdry. It cannot truly stimulate their fancy, call out their imagination, lead them to anything better; it cannot help them, it can only deaden their senses. It is of less value, indeed, than the moving pictures, which often have considerable dramatic ingenuity and educational interest. It is one of those hopeless things that seem so pathetically to hedge the lives of the masses.

In our so-called "first-class" theatres, of course, practically nothing at all is offered to interest or stimulate our children. No less under the control of private men for private gain than the poorer theatres, the two-dollar houses more completely neglect the young because their patronage is less a factor in com-

mercial prosperity. New York, to be sure, has its Hippodrome with Marcelline, the incomparable clown. In days past we have seen the success of "Little Lord Fauntleroy," of "The Little Princess," and of Mr. Barrie's "Peter Pan." But these are rare exceptions. When Mr. Conried conducted a German theatre in New York, he used to give children's plays every afternoon during the holidays. But we care less, it would appear, for our children than the Germans do for theirs, or even the English. We leave them out of the reckoning in the theatre. The joys the old Boston Museum used periodically to provide for the youngsters, in the days when that institution was a force in a homogeneous community, are no longer provided anywhere. This is chiefly significant as showing how little we reckon the value of the theatre in training the imagination of the child, for the children of those who patronize the two-dollar playhouse may justly be supposed to have other spurs to their fancy than the theatre. They go to good schools where athletic games are provided; they are taught at home to play; they have books in plenty, and from Scott and Stevenson draw on the wells of eternal romance. If, to be sure, they had also theatrical entertainments suited to their years, the next generation of theatre-goers would be



more imaginative, more responsive to the appeals of poetry and the higher ranges of drama. But their case is, nevertheless, not the pressing one. Where the theatre is criminally negligent in its duty as a social servant is among the children and young people of the masses, who know no other recreation, who turn to the playhouse in pathetic hordes, with a pathetic instinct to find there emotional and spiritual bread, and who are rewarded with a stone.

Miss Jane Addams, in her "Spirit of Youth and the City Streets," says:

" 'Going to the show' for thousands of young people in every industrial city is the only possible road to the realms of mystery and romance; the theatre is the only place where they can satisfy that craving for a conception of life higher than that which the actual world offers them. In a very real sense the drama and the drama alone performs for them the office of art, as is clearly revealed in their blundering demand stated in many forms for 'a play unlike life.' The theatre becomes to them a 'veritable house of dreams,' infinitely more real than the noisy streets and the crowded factories.

" This first simple demand upon the theatre for romance is closely allied to one more complex, which might be described as a search for solace and distraction in those moments of first awakening from the glamour of a youth's interpretation



of life to the sterner realities which are thrust upon his consciousness. These perceptions which inevitably 'close around' and imprison the spirit of youth are perhaps never so grim as in the case of the wage-earning child. We can all recall our own moments of revolt against life's actualities, our reluctance to admit that all life was to be as unheroic and uneventful as that which we saw about us; it was too unbearable that 'this was all there was' and we tried every possible avenue of escape. As we made an effort to believe, in spite of what we saw, that life was noble and harmonious, as we stubbornly clung to poesy in contradiction to the testimony of our senses, so we see thousands of young people thronging the theatres bent in their turn upon the same quest. The drama provides a transition between the romantic conceptions which they vainly struggle to keep intact and life's cruelties and trivialities which they refuse to admit. A child whose imagination has been cultivated is able to do this for himself through reading and reverie, but for the overworked city youth of meager education perhaps nothing but the theatre is able to perform this important office."

Again she writes, of the moving-picture houses (in which conditions have been greatly bettered since her book was issued):

"At present, however, most improbable tales hold the attention of the youth of the city night

after night, and feed his starved imagination as nothing else succeeds in doing. In addition to these fascinations, the five-cent theatre is also fast becoming the general social center and club house in many crowded neighborhoods. It is easy of access from the street, the entire family of parents and children can attend for a comparatively small sum of money, and the performance lasts for at least an hour; and, in some of the humbler theatres, the spectators are not disturbed for a second hour.

“The room which contains the mimic stage is small and cozy, and less formal than the regular theatre, and there is much more gossip and social life as if the foyer and pit were mingled. The very darkness of the room, necessary for an exhibition of the films, is an added attraction to many young people, for whom the space is filled with the glamour of love making.

“Hundreds of young people attend these five-cent theatres every evening in the week, including Sunday, and what is seen and heard there becomes the sole topic of conversation, forming the ground pattern of their social life. That mutual understanding which in another social circle is provided by books, travel and all the arts, is here compressed into the topics suggested by the play.”

In light of these words from a woman who, if anyone, can speak out of the fullness of knowledge, and in light of even the most superficial investigation of the character of entertainment

offered in our burlesque, vaudeville, and even moving-picture theatres, a critic would be very blind indeed if he did not realize that the problem of the theatre in America to-day stretches far beyond any boundaries of Broadway, any little squabbles of "Syndicates" and "Independents," and points directly to some form of organized control and practical endowment in the playhouses of the people.

Practically every experiment which has been intelligently made to interest the masses in the better things of the stage has met with substantial encouragement; that is, the children, the young people, and even the adults have shown themselves sensitive to its merits and eager for its ministrations. I have myself seen a performance of "Hamlet" given by young Italian boys and girls in a New York Settlement, which was remarkably well done and which created more interest and enthusiasm in the neighborhood than the most popular moving-picture film. The People's Institute has done what it could in New York to put good plays before the one hundred thousand or more people whom it serves, by securing half rates for them at such Broadway playhouses as were willing to make the reduction or were offering suitable dramas. It is significant that "The Servant in the House"

and "Peter Pan" both sold thousands of seats to the People's Institute before "the two-dollar public" discovered the merits of these plays. It is significant, also, that when Mr. Sothern and Miss Marlowe play Shakespeare at the old Academy of Music, far down town on the border of the East Side, they do an enormous business, undreamed of on Broadway. Recently a children's theatre was started on the East Side. It ended disastrously, at least for certain little girls of the company, because these high-strung and impressionable children, especially the self-assertive Jews, are not ready for so much self-exploitation. Mass play only is permitted in the schools, where even solo dances are wisely eliminated. But a theatre for children and a children's theatre are two different things. A theatre both for children, for young people, and for adults, wisely, patiently, and artistically administered in all our crowded centres of urban population, at prices to compete with the moving-picture theatres, would meet with an instant and hearty response, and would be an incalculable boon to the immediate community, and so, by making better citizens of the growing masses, to the community at large.

It is pathetic enough to hear the children of the well-to-do singing the inane songs from the latest "musical comedy," which their par-

ents teach them, apparently under the supposition that it is smart, or which they unconsciously pick up because it is the only music they hear at home. But these children will go to college, to the opera, to symphony concerts, and learn better — perhaps. It is pathetic enough, year in and year out, to see never a child in a Broadway theatre, the wonderland of drama opening its doors to them, never even a touch of childish fancy on the stage. But they, at home with their nurses, hear Grimm and Andersen read to them, and later they will read Stevenson and Scott and Dickens, they will play in the country under the expanding influence of Nature, they will hunt and fish and tramp.

But how about the children of the poor, especially in our city slums? They have too often no playground but the street, no home worth the name; no fairy tales are read to them, no influences are at work to expand their imaginations, to develop their perceptive faculties for beauty and mystery and charm; no music will ever come to their ears but the rag-time of the street. Except in so far as the public school can mould them, and the cheap theatre, their imaginations are untouched. These two forces, the public school and the cheap theatre, are the two forces of

greatest power in the lives of the poorer children in American cities to-day. And after the brief period of schooling, ending in almost all cases at fourteen years, the cheap theatre is alone in undisputed sway. We regulate the schools. But as yet we have done nothing, save in the single instance of the voluntary moving-picture censorship, to regulate the theatres, and less than nothing to provide better theatres. We have not done it because we do not realize as yet its importance. It is high time the realization came.

It is easy to say that the moving pictures, as at present presented, probably do little harm, save to the eyesight. They may even do much good, in lieu of anything better. But to claim for them anything like an ideal form of dramatic stimulation on the minds of young children is the height of folly. For the crude vulgarity or noisy cheapness of the vaudeville interpolations there can be no defense. For the raw sex appeal of the burlesque "shows" there is no defense, either. These "shows" should be under official supervision, at the least, and boys beneath the age of eighteen forbidden, perhaps, to attend their performance, just as we forbid the sale of liquors to minors. If the present laws do not permit of such a course, the laws should be altered. In the vaudeville theatres perhaps



the most pathetic feature is the large number of young men and girls extracting from this unspeakably inane and crude and cruelly and vulgarly prosaic form of entertainment nightly their one spice of freedom, of excitement, of release from sweat-shop toil and the dull toll of day. Almost as much as our treatment of the children, our treatment of these young people is a bitter sin.

For it must be borne in mind that these young people, even more, perhaps, than the children, know the cheap theatre as almost their sole means of recreation, cannot be restrained from attending it, find in it their standards of speech, of conduct, of taste. Not only Miss Addams but every worker among the masses has testified over and over again to the enormous influence of the cheap playhouse in urban life. It reaches the young, and even the old, as nothing else can. Its influence is irresistible. It ought to be our most potent weapon for progress. And we permit its administration to remain entirely in the hands of ignorant and grasping individuals; we permit it to be a weapon for the perpetuation of crassness, of vulgarity, of bad taste; we forego entirely its aid in reaching, through the senses and the fancy, the lives and hearts of our young.

Would these four hundred and fifty thou-



sand children who go to the picture shows in New York every week go to "Peter Pan" if it were presented in their neighborhood for ten cents? Try them and see! Would these young men and girls who come in from the dirt and smell and prying eyes of the street to make love in the darkened picture theatre, or who, in their poor, pathetic best, trip to a vaudeville show because it is an outing, because it is lively and a relief, attend a performance of "Romeo and Juliet" or "Twelfth Night," if that, instead, were within their means? Again, try them! Let us give them the benefit of the doubt—a doubt which every sign makes less a doubt—and assume that it is not, for most of them, the blatant crudeness, the horrible music, the vulgar prosiness of the vaudeville show which at first appeals, but its sense of difference from their lives, its glamour of foot-lights, its delicious flavor of an outing, of a good time. The romance of budding sex weaves its spell no less around them than around us, and in that mystic period many things may be glorified, and, for them, the rankest sentimental ballad fraught with irresistible allure.

But what an "other world" to give them at this period, when, if ever, their souls may be kindled to better things; what a crass and cruel influence to surround them with, when

their senses are alert, their emotions budding, their hearts ready for the great adventure of existence! They have no Shelley and Keats to read at home, no piano whereon Schumann and Schubert can be played, no garden paths between the roses down behind the house to the river, no canoe in which to drift over moonlit waters. Few enough chivalric instincts are alive in the air around them, few enough domestic influences make for delicacy and restraint and charm. In their daily lives there is no romance. In their daily lives there is no food for thought to feed on, nor for dreams. One and all they crowd to the theatre for what joy and wonder they can get out of life and their own new relations — and are met with a moving picture, a vaudeville show, a sickly sentimental ballad, or something worse!

Fancy, instead, a theatre where they might go to witness a good performance of "Romeo and Juliet," or "As You Like It," or even of some modern play where finer standards than theirs prevailed, where speech was more refined, where there was a glamour of poetry or true romance! Here beauty of dress and scenery would meet their eyes. Here true music would greet their ears. Here they would find themselves lifted into a story, swept along by its current, taken truly into

a different world from that of their daily lives, a better world, a more wonderful world, a world where new emotions swayed them, new vistas of expectation and experience opened out, new thoughts stirred. Here, in place of the voiceless, jumping pantomime of moving pictures, they would find the charm of spoken voice and lovely cadence; here, instead of screaming, aimless vaudeville inanity, they would find the charm of a sustained and fascinating story, the charm of mystery and romance. *Charm* — that is the word. There is no charm in their daily lives; at present there is no charm in their cheap entertainments, which are all they have, and to which they flock with pathetic eagerness. Until the heart of youth (and the heart of manhood) has ceased to know even the dull craving for charm, until charm has ceased to be a potent necessity in the life of the race if that life is to be happy and righteous and useful, then, and not until then, will the need cease for a better theatre for the masses, and their dumb willingness to respond to such a theatre cease also.

Some four million dollars were spent by certain rich men to establish the New Theatre in New York, where plays are presented at prices prohibitive to the masses, save on some half-dozen occasions a year, in an aristocratic

atmosphere, and at a distance so great from those whom a truly democratic theatre should serve that the bulk of the masses probably are not even aware of its existence. There is room, of course, for the New Theatre, but its purpose is, after all, narrowly æsthetic. Social service is no part of it. The People's Institute in New York does what it can to send school children, clerks, department-store girls, and others to the first-class theatres at reduced rates; but these rates are still not low enough, the Broadway theatres are not properly administered for children, and they are too far removed from the community to be served. In New York the start toward a true theatre for the masses could probably best be made by equipping the People's Institute with a playhouse on the East Side, and an endowment fund for the maintenance of the company. From the success of that theatre other theatres might result, both in New York and other cities. Ultimately such theatres should, of course, be under public control, just as there should be official censorship of moving pictures, burlesque, vaudeville, and other cheap amusement directly affecting the lives and characters of children. But the start will probably have to be made through private generosity, just as private generosity has already equipped the

People's Institute with a Symphony Orchestra (whose concerts, by the way, are plentifully patronized).

Such a theatre, to be of real service, should compete in price as well as propinquity with the moving pictures and vaudeville. It should be gay, animated, and hospitable in appearance. It should aim to give matinées of plays suited to children and evening performances of poetic plays suited to the young, as well as of modern dramas of contemporary life which deal soundly with moral or political issues, giving these eager new Americans who fill our slums something to think about and discuss. It should maintain a good, though naturally not an extraordinary, company of actors. Probably it could rely on such generous players as Mr. Sothern and Miss Marlowe, Mrs. Fiske, Henry Miller, and William Faversham for generous aid, they coming down for visiting performances once or twice a year. In this way the best we have in drama could, in the space of a season, be brought to the masses. Such a theatre could not be self-supporting, and should, indeed, be absolutely free from any need to attempt self-support. But experiment would show that the annual loss, because the theatre would be filled at all performances, would be inconsiderable in comparison with the results achieved. It

would be a splendid charity, and ultimately, in every large city, it should be a civic duty.

“The theatre is irresistible — organize the theatre,” said Matthew Arnold. The theatre is indeed irresistible. Nearly half a million children on Manhattan Island weekly crowd the moving-picture shows. A quarter of a million more go to vaudeville and burlesque. Young men and girls, old men and women, find their nightly recreation, their sole imaginative release, their one not-to-be-surrendered joy of a hard existence, in the cheap theatres of the town. We build them schools, we are learning to provide them with playgrounds and parks, we have already begun to furnish them lectures and, tentatively, a little music. But of equal importance with school and recreation field as a means of reaching the minds and hearts of the children and young people in our city slums, is the cheap theatre. Organize the theatre, then, supervise it, endow it. As the new recreation field is to the old gutter in the life of the poor city child, as the new municipal dance hall is to the old rum-shop “dancing academy,” conducted for private gain and fostering coarseness and vice, so will be the endowed and artistically administered theatre, where Shakespeare and the classics, children’s fairy plays and the



best of modern drama are presented at cheap rates, to the present moving-picture shows, the brutalizing vaudeville, and the sexually demoralizing burlesque. Such a theatre is scarcely less needed in every city than school-houses and playgrounds, and until this fact is realized and the proper action taken, we have left unused one of our most potent weapons for civic improvement.

## THE UNCONCEITED DRAMATISTS' CLUB

Should anyone so unfortunate as to have had a playwright in his family chance to read the title of this paper, doubtless he will exclaim, "The Unconceited Dramatists' Club! But where do they find the members?" I hasten at once to state that the club is an extremely exclusive organization, not from any desire on the part of the president, vice-president, and secretary-treasurer (who also compose the executive, house, and membership committees) to keep out candidates of whatever race or stripe, but because the constitution of the club calls for one definite test of admissibility; and so far only the president, vice-president, and secretary-treasurer have met this test. Indeed, some doubt appears to exist in their minds



whether they have. At a recent meeting there was considerable discussion about expelling one of the three for non-payment of humility. But no action was taken, because the executive committee could not decide which one to expel.

The club has, however, two non-professional associate members, who are not privileged to vote nor to hold office. (Neither, I might add, were they required to pass the test!) Their only prerogative is to sign checks. They are a dramatic critic and a theatrical manager. Such a selection would seem still further to indicate a lack of confidence in themselves on the part of the three dramatists—a lack of confidence, that is, in their humility, but a sense of possible confidence in their play-writing powers, suspended like the sword of Damocles over their heads. Perhaps they hope that with a dramatic critic on one side and a theatrical manager on the other any unseemly enthusiasm of theirs over the children of their brains will be summarily wet-blanketed. And their hope is not without justification.

The club meets Monday nights, on Broadway, in convenient spots adjacent to the theatres. This is a dangerous practice, but, as the president recently remarked, “Any man can be unconceited about his plays if he

doesn't see the other fellow's but stays at home and reads Ibsen."

"Would you read Ibsen if you stayed at home?" queried the vice-president.

But the president took refuge behind the dignity of his office, and the secretary-treasurer contributed this bit of crystal-clear humility: "I think a great deal can be learned from the reading of Ibsen."

"Do you?" said the critical associate member, with a certain asperity, known to his fellows as his cold-storage manner. "Do you, indeed? I'm surprised that you don't learn it, then."

"See here!" began the secretary-treasurer, with a touch of temper, "if you —"

"Silence!" said the president, rapping his glass on the table. "Frosty Face is but fulfilling his duty as associate member."

"I suppose so," said the secretary-treasurer, "still, I want to state —"

"No you don't," said the president. "You want another drink."

And so the talk was once more that of humble disciples of a noble art, and if, from time to time, it was intimated that the production of the new play across the street had grave defects due to the ignorance of the manager, the stupidity of the players, and the general incompetence of the playwright, still

it was not implied by any of the three club members that he himself had done, was doing, or could do better. To point out the defects in the work of another is surely not a sign of conceit in one's self. Criticism is impersonal. Or, at any rate, it may be noted that the greater the artist the more apt he is to discover a hidden talent in others, where the ordinary intelligence detects nothing at all. This being so — and the president of the club declares that it is, and cites as proof the fact that William Dean Howells, the kindly dean of American fiction, has discovered the great American novel once a season for the past two decades — then, say the club members, were they truly conceited they would praise, not blame, just to show that they are great artists. Turning upon the critical associate member, the secretary-treasurer spoke for his fellows.

“With humbleness,” he said, “we voluntarily recognize our meek privilege of small minds to criticise.”

Even the critic for once had nothing to say, and, what is more remarkable, he did not say anything.

But perhaps you are asking, what is the object of the Unconceited Dramatists' Club? Here is section II of the constitution, section I concerning itself with the name:

“Section II. The object of this club shall be to encourage among all members of the dramatic profession, but more especially among playwrights, the rare virtue of humility. The motto of this club shall be: ‘One press notice does not make a Shaw.’”

Section III may also, perhaps, prove of interest. It sets forth the method of testing members:

“Section III. Any candidate for admission to this club shall be required to respond to the following question, and if he fails to give the correct answer he shall be forcibly ejected from the club-rooms, nor shall his name ever again be presented for consideration:

“Question. ‘When did you first feel this Power?’

“Correct answer. ‘Oh, Rats!’”

The club was founded by the present president one morning at breakfast, after reading the reviews of a play of his produced the night before. For a long time he was the only member, but on a Tuesday morning the following Spring he read the daily press, called a meeting of himself and unanimously elected the present secretary-treasurer. The present vice-president received his election before one of his plays had been produced. Having met satisfactorily the test prescribed by Section III

of the constitution (though it is rumored his reply was couched in language similar in spirit rather than letter to the required form), and having further advanced the strong argument that it is much more difficult to be unconceited about your play before it is produced than after, he was duly admitted to the organization. He has since then seen a play of his own on the boards, and has survived that ordeal with a commendable stock of humility still at his command.

Contrary to your natural supposition, the three members are all young. The young are not, as a rule, greatly given to the pursuit of humility. Most of us are humbled by our achievements rather than our hopes. But the stage is a world unto itself, and as there is no assurance superior to that of a young actress except the assurance of an old actor, so the playwright persists to the last in his faith in himself, and if the young author's first untried manuscript seems to him fore-ordained to fortune, his last is "better than Ibsen."

And everywhere, all over our broad land, there is passionate wooing of the dramatic Muse. With an ardor contrary to all traditions of the establishment, she is wooed by undergraduates at Harvard. At Yale Pinero is now almost as highly regarded as Walter Camp. Actors and actresses spend their vaca-

tions in mad pursuit and recall all the effective scenes they have ever played, to assist in the act of composition. Into newspaper offices flutter her garments, rustle the litter of copy paper on the floor, and reporters rise and follow after. Novelists, discontented with the paltry returns on mere "best sellers," which reach only fifty or sixty editions, turn their tales into plays, and doubtless try to take Harrison Fisher's model away from him, to make her the star. Even the magazine uplifters beat their muck-rakes into stage properties, and neglect the welfare of the nation for the seductions of Melpomene. In one season alone two thousand play manuscripts were read at the New Theatre, and one thousand nine hundred and ninety-seven of them were rejected. But did those one thousand nine hundred and ninety-seven authors accept the decision with humility? No, not one of them, because not one of them was a member of the Unconceited Dramatists' Club. One thousand nine hundred and ninety-six times this sentence was repeated in various sections of the United States, "Well, the New Theatre does n't (or, don't) know a good play when it sees one."

Now, while there may be a grain of truth in this sentence, the individual cases in hand, alas, never proved it! For, to speak with all the



seriousness that the subject merits, it seems to be a psychological law of playwriting that the cock-sureness of the writer varies inversely as the difficulty of the art. Why that is, I cannot say. For many years I have sought in vain the true explanation. I only know from sad experience that it is so. If a man takes it into his head that he would like to paint a picture, and does paint a picture, he is not, therefore, at once convinced that he has committed a second Sistine Madonna, or is destined to cause any considerable falling off in the demand for Corots. Indeed, in the pictorial, plastic, and even the musical arts, a man is prepared to pass through a considerable apprenticeship before he calls himself an artist. But if a man commits four acts of a drama to paper, he is a playwright at once. If he gets them produced upon the stage, he is a dramatist. And if he does it a second time, and has been properly trained under the right university influences, he becomes a dramaturge. There is nothing higher than a dramaturge. The dramaturge "motivates" his plays before he writes them. When you see him approaching, run — unless you have no engagement for the rest of the afternoon. "Motivating" a play is a serious business. The dramaturge is a serious person. If you don't believe it, ask him.



I once knew an excellent reporter who at an unfortunate moment was sent to cover the opening performance of a play. The dramatic critic was sick, perhaps, or taking a holiday at a moving picture show. This reporter returned to his office with the announcement that if he could n't write a better play than —, he'd get a job in Brooklyn. His opinion of the play, thus rashly expressed, was no doubt critically sound; nor could he be blamed for not wishing to accept his self-imposed alternative without a struggle. But the fact remains that he knew nothing about playwriting, nor had he, as the elder theologians would say, been "called." For several weeks he left the office early and returned late the next day. And, in the course of time, I was permitted to take into my hands the type-written manuscript (a second, or carbon copy) of "The Davenports' Divorce." It combined, I was calmly informed, "the technique of Ibsen with the amusing surface detail of Fitch." Such a mixture of ingredients manifestly produced a brew which could not fail to please all palates. And this erstwhile modest and efficient reporter began to dream of royalties, and cultivated the automobile editor.

Alas! "The Davenports' Divorce" was never tried in public. It was, to be sure, aired at a special *matinée*, when its utter unfitness

for the stage became apparent to everybody except the author. But far from teaching him the obvious lesson, this failure but fixed him the more firmly in his determination to be a dramatist. He began to assume the rôle of martyr. With a persistence and fertility of invention worthy of a defeated golf player he would explain the reasons for the failure of his drama to anybody who would listen. And with none of these reasons did he himself have anything to do! Meanwhile he set about the composition of a second masterpiece. Happy and hopeful, he has been "putting the finishing touches upon it" for the past three years. And he still cultivates the automobile editor.

But it is by no means necessary to have failed as a playwright in order to lose one's perspective about one's self. Success works almost as surely, and much more quickly. For it will be noted by the observant theatregoer that occasionally a play does succeed, outside of the New York *Herald*. The poor, despised critic, looking upon a successful play in the theatre and searching for the causes of its popularity, usually detects them in its truth of characterization, its qualities of interest and suspense in construction, its wit, but above all in its sincerity. It is never easy to say why one play seems sincere, another insincere; but it is never possible to make a mistake. Yet,

quaintly, the playwright too often seems to neglect this element of sincerity entirely in his calculations. Let him "put one over," to employ the expressive idiom of the profession, and the chances are ten to one that he will think the task was just as easy as you, who sit out front and never tried to write a play (if there exists such a person!), also think it. He will, in a serene self-confidence that he possesses an unfailing mathematical formula for creating effective drama, "sign up" a contract with a manager the day after his success is launched, agreeing to provide in the next three days the scenario of a comedy for Miss Blank, and to have the first act ready for rehearsal in three weeks.

Of course, he has n't a real idea in his head for a comedy for Miss Blank, nor perhaps for anybody else. His first play succeeded because he felt strongly the humor of some situation, or was filled with a desire to express the indignation that was in him against some social wrong. It probably succeeded not because he was a genius, but because the Lord, in His infinite if inscrutable wisdom, selected him to be the mouthpiece of a cause. But does he realize that? No, indeed! Perhaps for Miss Blank's "vehicle" he selects a situation in which he does not feel strongly the humor at all, but fancies Miss Blank would play it effec-

tively; or perhaps he selects a social evil to attack concerning which he knows little and cares less, but which is prominently in the papers and so seems a "timely topic" for drama. One attack on a social evil succeeded, so of course another will. But in spite of this lucid reasoning his play fails. And he cannot understand why. It is curious how little playwrights appear to know, sometimes, about writing plays.

"All of which is undoubtedly true," said the president, at a recent meeting of the Unconceited Dramatists' Club, where these sentiments were expressed, "but it seems to be an inevitable result of present-day dramatic conditions. You see, the production of plays is regarded as a trade, not an art. And we all know that the egotism of tradespeople is superior to all other brands. A real artist is comparatively humble. A successful stockbroker or a railroad president assumes an attitude of inordinate importance, and we Americans take him at his own valuation, the way the French took Victor Hugo. The most conceited man I ever knew was not an actor, nor an operatic tenor, nor a playwright. He was the manufacturer of a much-advertised brand of face powder; and the next most conceited was the president of a trust company. Once let the Tired American Business Man and

his weary wife regard the production of plays not as an industry to manufacture and peddle pleasure, but as a fine art, and they'll soon enough reduce us to humbleness!"

"You might explain that a little more," said the secretary-treasurer, with some asperity. "I don't consider myself a tradesman."

"You are, though," said the president. "You are nothing else—a tradesman or a skilled mechanic, as you choose. What are you doing right now? You are adapting a French farce for the Tired American Business Man and a few thousand dollars, and taking out of it, in obedience to Saxon tradition, everything which made it interesting to a sane intelligence. Oh, you're using some technical skill in the process, I'll admit! But you're an artisan, not an artist; you're a tradesman, not a creator."

"And what are you doing 'right now,' I should like to inquire?" snapped the secretary-treasurer.

"I?" said the president. "I? I am writing a 'comedy-drama'—whatever that is—to fit a young woman who pleases the public and can't act. The scenario was devised by herself and her manager on an automobile ride, so they say. Personally, I suspect the chauffeur. This scenario does n't in the least interest me. The characters are all animated

puppets, there is no inevitableness, no philosophy of life, no poetry, no passion, no truth, no nature, in the whole inane affair. But I'll put in some smart talk — steal a few epigrams from Congreve or Oscar Wilde, maybe — stick in two or three character 'bits' right off Broadway, slang and all, to make it seem real to the provincial New York audiences, and I'll clean up \$300 to \$500 a week for the next two seasons. I've got \$1,000 advance royalties in my pocket now. That's good trade, is n't it? But art—your grandmother!"

"Exactly," said the vice-president, who as a rule is the silent member of the club, "but what I want to know is, why is there anything in that to get conceited about?"

"Hear, hear!" cried the dramatic critic, causing a waiter to come running in their direction.

The president grew grave, and spoke slowly, after a considerable pause. "Well," he said at last, "as I dope it out, the reason is n't at all the one most commonly assigned. It is n't at all because a playwright — the ephemeral playwright, like us chaps here — lives almost as much by the public favor as the actors themselves, even if his name is in much smaller type, measures his success and has his success measured for him on all sides, not by his truth to nature, but by box-office receipts — that



is, by public recognition. It is n't because the playwright is necessarily a part of this hectic, egotistical world of the theatre. The reason is just what I intimated a while back — because the drama for most of us is a trade, not an art. The reason is not that our art is judged commercially, but that our art is n't art at all but a trade product. Down deep in his soul, every tradesman knows that he is an inferior being to the real artist, the creator of ideal forms. Nobody likes to feel, even at the bottom of his soul, that he is an inferior being. He struggles to find arguments to disprove his conviction. And in our case the world provides one very plausible argument, and stands ready to help us hammer it home — ”

“And that is?” said the vice-president, when the speaker broke off.

“I'm trying to phrase it,” the other resumed, — “and that is, the financial success which crowns mediocrity. A true artist often — not always, but often — starves. The clever tradesman in drama (or music or pictures or novels, for that matter) never does. Ideals command much less a price than inanities. We can't furnish the ideals, but, ah, ha! we can get the price. We hug it, poor delusion that it is, to our bosoms; we bolster up our soul-pride with it. My God, what a trade



standard it is! But sooner or later, in defense against our own shame, we let it turn us into conceited monkeys, worthy of swinging by our prehensile tails in the stock exchange!"

The club was silent for a space. Then the dramatic critic spoke. "I seem to recall several dramatists, even to-day," he said, "who are rather uncompromisingly artists, writing entirely to please themselves and creating ideal forms, who yet enjoy a fair measure of popular success. One of them, indeed, enjoys the rare distinction, if I am not mistaken, of drawing twenty-five per cent royalties, that canny Scot, J. M. Barrie. Then there is Mr. Pinero, and Mr. Maeterlinck, and Mr. Hauptmann, and Mr. Sudermann, and —"

"Hold on a minute!" cried the president. "I never said real art would n't succeed in the theatre. It always will, in the theatre or anywhere else, if you give it time. And these men have all had time. But we've got vastly more theatres to fill than we've got real artists to write for them, and we've got vastly more people to amuse than are capable of appreciating a Barrie, let alone a Hauptmann. It's because all these theatres are lumped into one collection called 'The Theatre,' and all the people writing for them, tradesmen and artists, are lumped indiscriminately into one class called playwrights, that the trouble

comes. When you line up Ibsen with George M. Cohan, what is there left for Cohan to do but to point to his pocketbook? You've got to give every man something to brag about. That's what makes us men."

"But what can you brag about, as members of the Unconceited Dramatists' Club?" asked the critic.

"We brag about that," said the president.

THE END























